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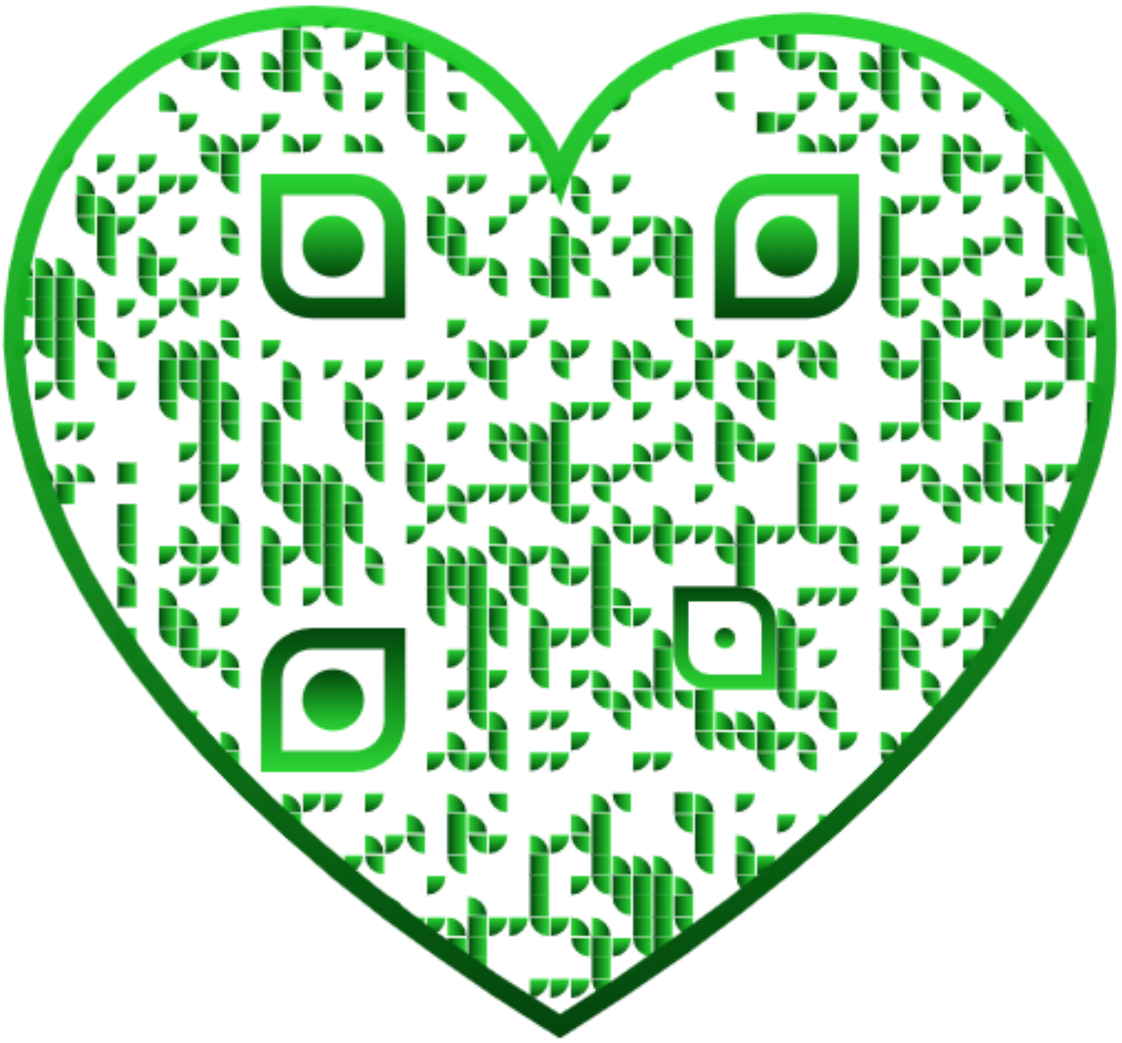

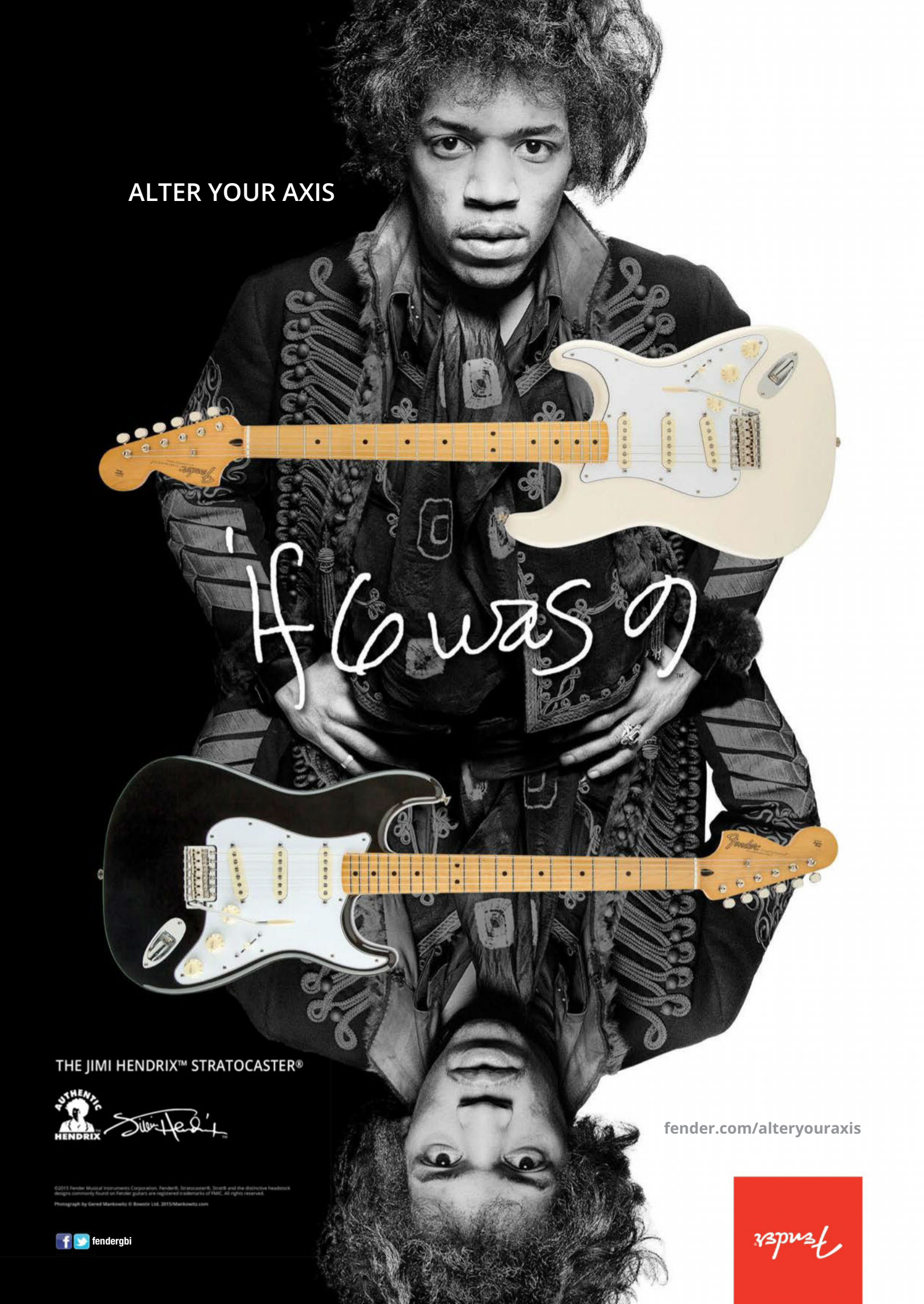
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Memory of a free spirit...

Shortly before this issue went to press, the news broke of David Bowie's tragic passing at the age of 69. The word genius is thrown around so liberally these days that it has almost become a cliche to acknowledge its overuse. Nevertheless, there's little doubt that Bowie was touched by a ferocious, otherworldly genius that placed the best of his work on the very highest branches of pop's tree, along with that of Elvis, Dylan and The Beatles. Bowie clearly knew a great guitarist when he heard one, and the remarkable list of six-string stars with whom he worked – Ronson, Belew, Alomar, Fripp, Rodgers, SRV, Gabrels and more – is further proof of the esteem in which he was held by his fellow professionals. When David called, you picked up the phone. Whoever you were.

Of course, Bowie was a useful guitarist in his own right – there's the brilliant *Rebel Rebel* riff for a start – and as a producer he helped Lou Reed and Iggy Pop make the best records of their lives. So much has already been said about Bowie's artistic wanderlust, but if we can learn anything from him as musicians it's perhaps the power and potential of collaboration. Whether you are writing, recording, performing live or all three, make music with as many other people as you can and you might discover the kind of winning partnership that results in something far greater than the sum of its parts. In David Bowie's case, the individual parts were pretty damn good in the first place, but that doesn't mean the rest of us mere mortals can't follow his shining example.

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THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS...

DAVE HUNTER

Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*. Check out his column on page 10.

HUW PRICE

Huw spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and NIck Cave. His book *Recording Guitar & Bass* was published in 2002, sparking a career in guitar journalism. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps and FX.

RICHARD PURVIS

A reformed drummer, Richard has been gigging for over 20 years as a guitarist and bassist, and working as a music journalist for almost as long. He also composes music for television, and is legally married to his 1966 Gibson Melody Maker.

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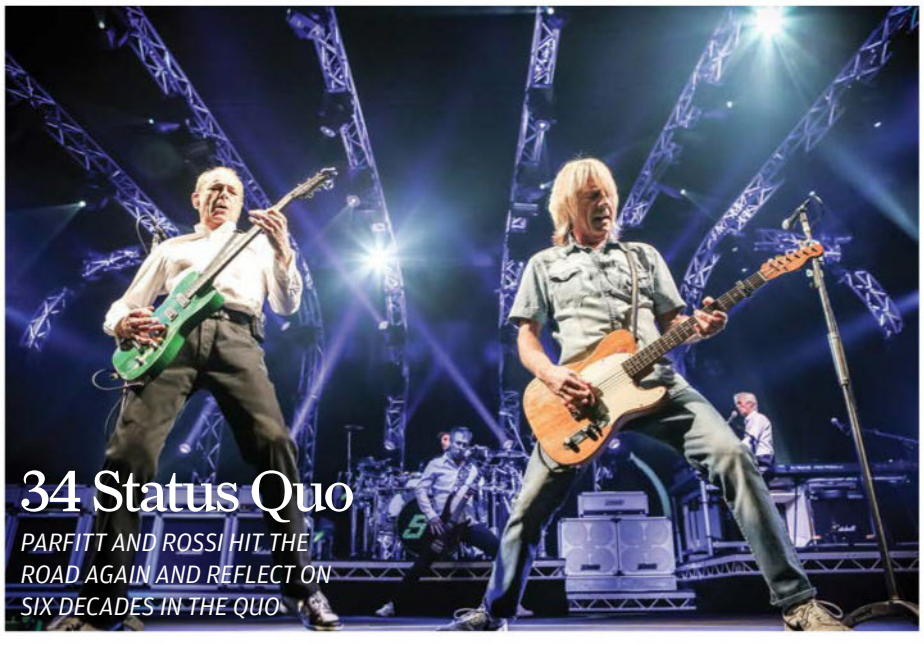
G&B runs the rule over three gorgeous new guitars that deliver classic Gretsch looks and tones for less than £400 each



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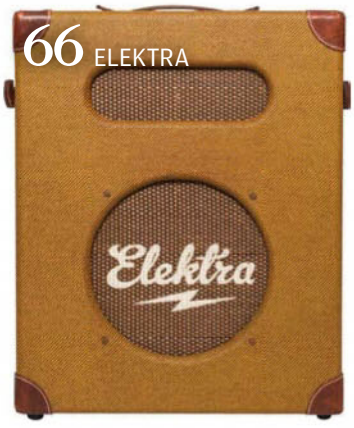

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Opening bars...

A tribute to Lemmy and your chance to win a pair of pedals from TC Electronic

IAN FRASER (LEMMY) KILMISTER 1945-2015

Bob Hewitt remembers the life of his friend and former Hawkwind and Motörhead legend Lemmy, who passed away on 28 December

If I was the stonemason inscribing Lemmy Kilmister's headstone, I'd probably simply chip out the word 'LEGEND'.

The 'sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll' lifestyle has been documented extensively in the tabloid press – I see no place to mention that aspect of his life here in *Guitar & Bass*. Except to say that Lemmy was a guy who lived life to the full and that rock music was the epicentre of that life.

Ian Fraser Kilmister (often misspelled Kilminster) died just days after his 70th birthday, having been diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer that affected his brain and throat.

He was born in Burslem, a Staffordshire pottery town, but moved to North Wales at an early age. It was there that we first met in the early 1960s. You couldn't miss Lemmy Willis (as he was known back then), he was a really charismatic character who stood out from the crowd.

We would meet up to visit the Sunnyvale Holiday Camp near my (then) home in Kinmel Bay, especially to watch a father and son guitar and organ duo from Manchester who performed at lunchtimes to entertain the holidaymakers. All I can really remember is Lemmy being transfixed by 'Dave the Guitarist', as he was known, who wore a red sparkly jacket his mum had made for him, to match his equally sparkly guitar! Looking back now, I think it was one of the Italian Ekos that were so popular at the time.

We were both guitar-mad teenagers, although Lemmy was a few years older than me and already dabbling in local bands. We would spend hours together in Rhyl's Wimpy burger bar – making one cup of frothy coffee last all afternoon, whilst shoving sixpences into the jukebox to listen to Lemmy's favourite group, Johnny Kidd & The Pirates. Another favourite pastime was compiling our 'guitar wish list' from the Bell Music and Selmer catalogues.

All too soon, Lemmy moved to Manchester to try to get a gig with one of the 'beat groups' in the North West. We lost touch (no Facebook or mobile phones back then) and I didn't see him again until 1987, when we met briefly backstage at the Hammersmith Odeon following a Rory Gallagher concert. Sadly, that was the last time I saw him – although I was due to interview him for this very magazine during Motörhead's 2016 tour.

Lemmy quickly established his presence with various Manchester rock groups, most famously The Rockin' Vickers. He also did a stint with Jimi Hendrix, working with his road crew. After watching Jimi perform night after night, Lemmy cited that experience as the reason for giving up guitar and moving over to the bass!

Hawkwind further elevated Lemmy's status, and perhaps his finest moment from that era is the psychedelic anthem *Silver Machine* – a number that pushed Lemmy to the front because the other band members couldn't deliver the vocal with the same grunt! A fall-out resulted in Lemmy departing Hawkwind, and he formed the power trio Motörhead in 1975.

Motörhead were both exciting and awesome from the start, but it was all about Lemmy; the man in the centre, with his instantly recognisable stance at the microphone and a voice like a jet engine on take-off.

His favourite guitars were his trademark Rickenbacker 4001 and 4003 basses – often modified with Gibson pickups. He played bass like a lead guitar, through a wall of Marshall amps. Both manufacturers acknowledged Lemmy's loyalty to their brands with signature models.

Motörhead defined a genre of music for others to follow. Despite the accolades and rock 'n' roll lifestyle, Lemmy always remained true to his roots – he hardly lost that slight Stoke accent and had no airs and graces. He had time for everyone, and enjoyed hanging out at his favourite haunt, the Rainbow Bar & Grill, just a short distance from his Los Angeles apartment. He was well read and educated, especially with regard to militaria and war history, and ammassed a vast collection of memorabilia.

Despite recording 22 Motörhead albums, it will probably be the song *Ace Of Spades* that defines Lemmy; the phrase 'play it loud' was designed for that track. Lemmy also guested on a multitude of albums and famously collaborated with Girlschool for the 1980 hit *Please Don't Touch*.

There was only one Lemmy – dressed in black, resplendent 'mutton chop' sidies, head cranked skywards, with his Rickenbacker thrashing out riffs. We'll all miss you – rock in peace old friend.

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Letters from America

Designed by Ken Fischer and built in Louisiana, the Komet 60 is a modern classic valve amp par excellence. **DAVE HUNTER** plugs in...

DAVE HUNTER
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of numerous books including *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*.

I first heard talk of this fabled breed of amplifier while sitting at my desk at the old *Guitar Magazine* offices in Croydon around 1999 or 2000, many years prior to this esteemed publication's renaming and its move west. There was talk of a serious creation designed by the legendary Ken Fischer of Trainwreck Circuits, which was being built by a small operation that called itself Komet down in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The amp itself was known simply as the Komet 60. It was the first – and for a time, the only – amp Komet offered, and it was here to do business. In time, Komet developed and marketed other models. The scorched-earth Concorde followed on from another Fischer design, the Limited (a limited edition), as did the Voxy Songwriter 30 model, while Komet designed the Constellation and, a little later, its first club-sized amp – the 19 – and the four-EL84-powered Aero 33. The 60, however, remains the Komet flagship; and for all the great amps that have come (and sometimes gone) in the 16-plus years since its arrival, for all the boom in the boutique world et al, it remains one of the most formidable professional tone tools available. It's a serious amp for serious players, and although there might be one out there somewhere, I have yet to encounter a guitarist who has plugged into a 60 and found the experience to be anything less than breathtaking.

Previous instalments of Letters have featured new gear, but this time out – while the gist is still the same – we're looking at an amp that was made in early 2002. Since the circuit and build quality haven't changed in the least, it makes no difference; aside from that, this one is in like-new condition, and it comes to us with an interesting back story. Komet is the amp-manufacturing arm of Riverfront Music, a vintage guitar and amp repair shop run by Holger Notzel and Michael Kennedy, that opened its doors in Baton Rouge in 1998. Having cultivated a long-distance friendship with Fischer, German ex-pat Notzel convinced the tube-amp guru to design the fledgling company's first model (and has himself been the designer of other non-Fischer Komet designs since), while Kennedy is the operation's chief builder. Every so often, Notzel and Kennedy would simply give an amp to Fischer, who lived several states northward in New Jersey. By the time this amp was released, Fischer was unable to build any more of his legendary Trainwreck amps, and virtually unable to play the guitar, due to the ravages of the chronic fatigue immune dysfunction syndrome from which he suffered, and which took his life at the age of 61 on 23 December, 2006. The amp I'm checking out this issue is just such a 'gift' amp: it was signed and dated by Fischer himself on one side of the inside of the cabinet, named 'Julie' on the other, and shortly after gifted to an industry contact whom he wanted to thank for his support – as was often his wont.

I have yet to encounter a guitarist who has plugged into a 60 and found it less than breathtaking

The Komet 60 stays true to Fischer's ethos (and, by proxy, Komet's own ethos) of simplicity married to quality components and workmanship. The signal path is kept as direct as possible

KEY FEATURES

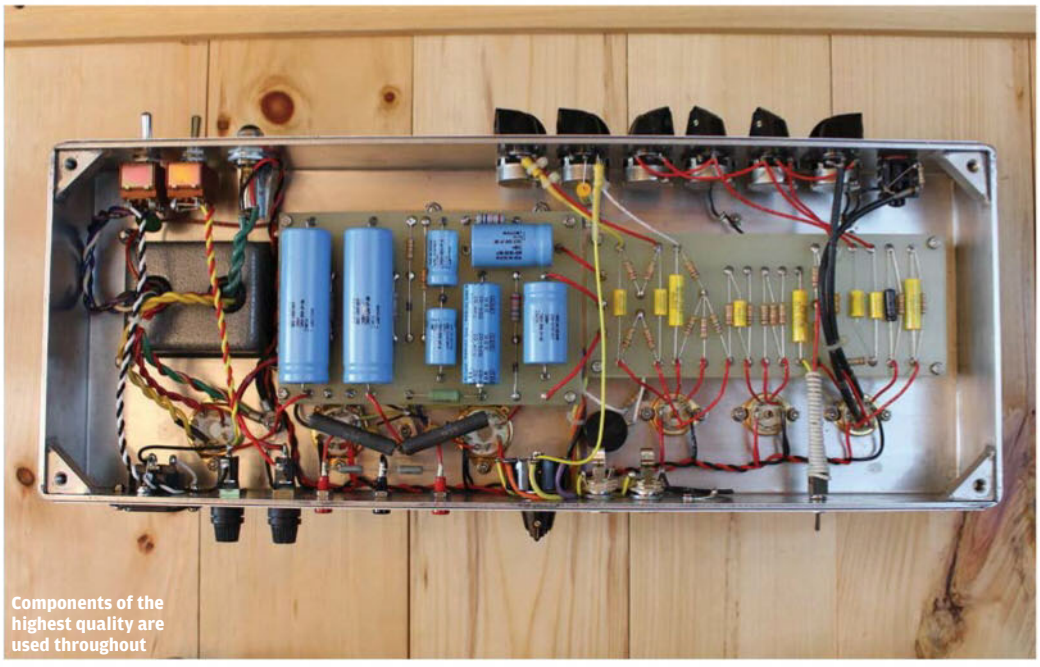
Komet 60

- **PRICE** $3,999 (approx. £2,686 excluding any shipping and duties)
- **CONTROLS** Volume, treble, middle, bass, presence, cut; fast/gradual 'touch response' switch on back panel
- **OUTPUT** 50-60 watts, depending on output tubes
- **TUBES** 3x 12AX7s, 2x EL34s (swappable for 6L6s, KT66s, KT77s, 6550s and others), GZ34 rectifier
- **FEATURES** Dual speaker outputs, with switch for 4, 8 and 16 ohms; rear-panel bias test points with latching bias-level potentiometer
- **DIMENSIONS** 571x228x228mm
- **WEIGHT** 38lbs/17.2kg
- **CONTACT** kometamps.com, **kometamp@cox-internet.com**

– no effects loop, no master volume, no built-in effects or extraneous features whatsoever – and it's all put together immaculately. Which isn't to say the 60 is devoid of flexibility.

The control panel has the typical Plexi complement of volume, treble, midrange, bass and presence, plus an added hi-cut to tame highs at the output stage. Around the back, though, lurks the 60's most powerful voicing tool: the touch response switch. Labelled 'fast' one side and 'gradual' the other, this mini toggle governs Fischer's reconfiguration of an old feature of some valve hi-fi amps, tapping into a split-load circuit in the preamp. Fast gives the first preamp tube hotter biasing for a more hot-rodded sound with extremely dynamic control of breakup according to your pick attack, while gradual divides the bias to a second resistor to cool down the first gain stage somewhat, yielding a more typical classic-rock sound and feel.

Otherwise, the 60's circuit is perhaps most similar to Fischer's legendary Trainwreck Express, although it's far from a copy of that highly collectible amp and has very much of its own thing going on. For one of many differences, the Komet 60 can swap to 6L6s, KT66s, KT77s, 5881s and several other octal output valves from its standard EL34s, with an extremely easy re-bias achieved thanks to the rear bias-check points and a large, confidence-inspiring bias-level potentiometer that has two tiers of numbers for easy re-tuning of any tubes you have previously checked and marked, with a latch on the side to lock your setting firmly in place. Other components inside the 1/8"-thick aircraft-grade, laser-cut aluminium chassis are equally impressive; and include expensive military-grade two-watt PEC potentiometers, audiophile-grade gold-plated valve sockets, NKK switches, silver-tinned Teflon hookup wire, custom-designed USA-made transformers, high-end capacitors and resistors and more.



Components of the highest quality are used throughout

Tested through a range of speaker cabs, using a Komet Airbrake power attenuator to rein in higher-volume settings, playing a Gibson Custom Shop 1959 Les Paul Reissue, a 1957 Fender Telecaster and a Gretsch-style Thorn Artisan Limited with TV Jones Classic pickups, the Komet 60's playing experience more than lived up to the expectations established by its build quality and componentry.

The 60's circuit is perhaps most similar to Fischer's legendary Trainwreck Express

In short, this is an amp for the ages; in long, phew... you just don't want to stop playing a tone generator like this one. You'll hear this from other guitarists familiar with the 60: the amp's glory is as much a feel thing as a sound thing.

This Komet 60 is signed inside by Ken Fischer

It sounds fantastic, make no mistake, but the element that really shifts your playing perspective is the way its dynamic responsiveness – and in either mode, fast or gradual – allows you such intimate control of the circuit's response. With the volume set to 2 o'clock and touch response at gradual to begin with, gentle picking elicits shimmering, harmonically resplendent tones that are utterly three dimensional, and which somehow magically still pass for 'clean', but which segue seamlessly into juicy, pliant valve grind when you simply hit the guitar harder. Further degrees of response are available at your guitar's volume control, and we haven't even explored the vastly flexible EQ yet (which, suffice to say, reveals a greater and more usable range from each knob than the classic treble-middle-bass arrangement). Even during gentle playing, the amp is ready to soar into willing harmonic feedback, yet it's all controllable, and all an utter delight to manipulate. All great so far – then switch to fast mode for a hair-trigger, seat-of-the-trousers ride that captures an entirely new realm of thrilling. A modern classic, then? Oh, by a long chalk.

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THE Guitar & Bass INTERVIEW

"We're about to hit new territory in 2016. It's the beginning of a new chapter"

At a time when British guitar music appears devoid of a credible standard bearer, Foals enter the new year with a brilliantly bold and expansive fourth album, a Brit Awards nomination and a sprawling world tour that will see them play the biggest shows of their lives. *Guitar & Bass* meets the great hope for UK indie music

Story **Gary Walker**

Four albums and 11 years in, Foals stepped into 2016 with the resolution to become absolutely massive, to fill the gaping void for a bloody huge British indie band, filling arenas, headlining festivals and appealing simultaneously to beard-stroking hipsters and the daytime-radio masses.

The campaign has started well. With *What Went Down* – one of the outstanding albums of 2015 – under their belt, the band have scooped a nomination for Best British Group at the Brits, flying the flag for fresh, thoughtful guitar music in a category where the other contenders are Coldplay, U2, Blur, One Direction and Years & Years.

A flurry of sweaty, high-octane UK and US gigs in November and December set them up to hit the new year at a gallop with a string of Australian dates and a UK and European arena tour that swallows up all of January and February – spearheaded by a show at Wembley. From there, they dive headlong into the global festival season, with bill-topping appearances all over Europe, Northern, Central and Southern America – all the while the stages and audiences getting bigger. The Oxford band, it seems, don't know the meaning of the words 'day off'.

"We're about to hit new territory in 2016," says guitarist Jimmy Smith, who formed the band along with singer and fellow guitarist Yannis Philippakis, bassist Walter Gervers, drummer Jack Bevan and keyboardist Edwin Congreave in Oxford in 2005. "It's going to be another step up. The live shows are getting much, much bigger this year. It's the beginning of a new chapter for our band, and we'll go ahead and we'll try to absolutely slay 2016 and then see where we are.

"We've got these arena shows in the UK; it's crazy, it's absolutely nuts that our band can play arenas. Even the shows in Europe are much bigger now – they're almost double >

After a decade touring together, Smith and Philippakis have developed a seamless understanding in their playing

the size. We're starting to get big offers from festivals and it's pretty daunting stuff."

What Went Down, Foals' most complete and expansive album to date, was released in August, recorded in the remote Provence village where Nostradamus was born and a tormented Vincent Van Gogh was treated in the psychiatric asylum of a monastery after cutting off his own ear.

It was one of the stand-out albums of 2015, from the psycho krautrock and menacing electric piano of the opening track through the blissful synth-splashed West Coast soul and funk vibes of *Birch Tree* to the gut-punchingly wistful *London Thunder*. It expands Foals' previous forays into dreamy synth splendour, without straying too far from the anthemic indie-guitar formula that earned Mercury Prize nominations for previous album *Holy Fire* in 2013 and 2010's *Total Life Forever*. It represents the culmination of an evolutionary path winding from the minimalism and staccato guitar of their early years, often given the umbrella label 'math-rock', to a wonderfully widescreen sound.

Its genesis dates back to the morning after a headline set at Bestival in 2014, at the end of another huge tour – the band have played nearly 300 dates since the beginning of 2013 – with Foals foregoing the opportunity of a holiday and marching straight into the studio.

"It was pretty similar to the writing for *Holy Fire*," recalls Smith. "We've got a really small studio in Oxford that we rent from the council, where we always used to practise. We thought it would be cool to have that as our HQ; it's a tiny, tiny sweatbox of a room.

"We finished at Bestival in September 2014, took a couple of weeks off and went to Oxford and started writing. We didn't put any pressures on whether we wanted to come up with anything straight away, but it was going pretty well so we stuck it out until January, when most of the record was finished.

"Saint-Remy-de-Provence was amazing. It was this incredible studio, La Fabrique, just outside of Saint-Remy. It's an old mill originally, and there's a big studio and a house to live in, run by this French couple. It's super-homely and down to earth. It's quite simple and I can't think of a better way to record an album. We did it for two months and it was one of the best times of my life."

James Ford, who produced the second Arctic Monkeys album, garnered Mercury Prize nominations of his own for work with Klaxons and The Last Shadow Puppets, and founded the band Simian Mobile Disco, was picked to oversee the sessions.

"James came on board towards the end of writing and hammered home the point that we should probably try to finish structuring every song before we got to France, to use the

Jimmy swapping guitar duties for Rhodes piano

studio for what it's for – recording rather than writing music," explains Smith. "He comes from a musician's background – he was in bands before he started producing, and he could get more involved than any producer we've worked with in the past.

"He can basically play any instrument, so he learnt the songs with us and could see them from our perspective, which was pretty cool. Some producers like to keep their distance and sit behind the desk, but he was the other way round, which sped up the process. If we were stuck with a problem and couldn't find our way out of the chorus, he already knew the song so well that he knew what the solution was.

"A lot of the synths on the album come from James. He's an absolute genius when it comes to synth. He's got all his modular equipment that he brings along, and he just knows how to use synths, whereas I don't have a clue. I just mash the buttons until I get a sound vaguely like I want! I described the sound I wanted for *London Thunder* and James had it in about 30 seconds."

We put it to Jimmy that in *What Went Down*, Foals have made an album with broader appeal, where brooding Rhodes piano numbers such as *London Thunder* sit alongside, more immediate, ballsy indie-rock.

"We don't just want to make a full-on rock album from start to finish," he replies. "All the bands we love and admire are able to shift in dynamics; and when you're listening to an album, if when you get to the end it has big mood changes and sonic changes, it feels as if you've gone on a journey, which to me is the point of an album.

> "We've got ourselves to a position where it feels that we can do exactly what we want, now there's more freedom"

"It feels like *What Went Down* finished off what we'd tried to do on *Holy Fire*. It feels that those two albums were similar in the writing process and what we wanted to achieve sonically, but now it's exciting because we feel that we can do our weird album. We've got ourselves to a position where it feels we can do exactly what we want – which we've always done, but now there's more freedom."

Live and dangerous

When *Guitar & Bass* see Foals live on their pre-Christmas tour, it's an almost religious experience, as they have a 1,200-capacity crowd united in perpetual movement from beginning to end in a way few current guitar bands we've watched can. At times, it has the same sense of communion as live dance music, at others it's pure rock 'n' roll. Yannis rips fuzzed-up solos from his Travis Bean guitar, stood atop a speaker stack, head jammed into the PA, while Smith moves between guitar and a Rhodes piano that he runs through a pair of Fender Bassmans. It's easy to see why they were voted *Q* magazine's best live act in 2013, and nominated for the same prize by NME in 2011 and 2013.

"We always try to give it everything we've got because that's how we grew up, and every band we loved when we were young it seemed evident that they treated every song as being as important as the last," says Smith. "We've been released back onto the road now and it's an incredible feeling playing a show, especially with our crowds – I feel like we've got the best crowds out there."

"It's kind of the ongoing joke in the band now that I'm officially the rhythm guitarist," laughs Smith. "But I think that's bad-ass, as I like rhythm guitarists. Yannis handles >

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Look, no hands: Yannis with his Travis Bean guitar

the solos – we've actually got solos now, which is weird. They sort of crept in without us noticing. I don't think I've played a solo in my life – I don't know how to do it and I'd probably get terminal stage fright."

Smith's playing journey began playing classical guitar with his mother, before he bought his first electric – a Mexican Strat – on Denmark Street and first heard the music of Nirvana and Radiohead, who went to the same Oxfordshire school he attended along with Gervers.

"Jonny Greenwood single-handedly changed the way I thought about guitar," he says. "It's completely unconventional and he's got a really good balance between using amazing effects and being able to make his guitar sound like anything – a synth, a violin or god knows what... or using a pound coin as a pick and it sounding incredible. Rhythmically he's amazing, too."

Like Greenwood, Smith has retained his love of Fender guitars, preferring Jaguars and Classic Player Jazzmasters, while the Radiohead man mainly uses a Tele or a Starcaster. Smith's currently playing Limited Edition Olympic White, Black and Sunburst models and Surf Green and Faded Sonic Blue guitars specially made for him by Fender, through an Orange Rockerverb head. Fender provided the amps for the album sessions, too – a '68 Custom Vibrolux, '65 Deluxe Reverb, '68 Deluxe Reverb, '65 Super-Reverb and Vibro-King and '65 Princeton.

Yannis plays exclusively guitars made by the now-deceased Californian luthier Travis Bean. The distinctive aluminium-necked guitars with their capital T headstock cutaway are a foundation of the Foals sound.

"That's the only guitar he uses," explains Smith. "They are pretty bloody good. He uses it with a Hiwatt, which is one of the best guitar sounds ever for a powerful clean sound, and I think the key with the Travis Bean is it has an aluminium neck mounted all the way to the back of the body, and the pickup sits directly on the aluminium neck – and that just does something to the sound.

"It's pretty full and rounded, but not trebly. It's the dream clean sound as far as Foals are concerned. I've been trying to match it ever since and it's a bit of a nightmare for me."

Delay, too, is fundamental to the Foals blueprint, with the two guitarists' syncopated rhythms dancing in and out of each other. "We used to just use the [Boss] DD-3, but it got a bit complicated trying to change the delay time between songs," says Smith, "so for the last two albums we've used the Strymon TimeLine, and it's really good because you can programme in the BPM of the songs, and then you just scroll through them. They're amazing pedals and I haven't really got to grips with what you can actually do with them – they're capable of anything and pretty much the best delay pedal you can get. A couple of months ago, I put my old DD-3 back on the pedalboard because >

JIMMY'S JAZZMASTERS

Smith's Jazzmasters are all supplied by Fender, and the company has even made him his own bespoke range with original colours and matching headstocks. "I've had quite a few Jazzmasters from Fender, all Mexican Classic players, and I had a problem with the strings coming off," says Jimmy. "We played Lollapalooza in Chicago. It was my birthday and they gave me a Mexican Sunburst Jaguar and told me it was specifically designed so I could play it really hard, and I plugged it in on stage, and on the first note the three bottom strings all came off! Now my guitar tech is on it and sorts it all out for me.

"My guitars are super-cool. I requested that I repaint some of the guitars Fender give me, and wanted to paint them the original surf colours – Sonic Blue and Surf Green – and Neil [Whitcher, Fender's European head of artist relations] said 'how about we just make them for you?'. I've got four now – two of each. It's pretty great!

"I like the fact that Jazzmasters are pretty loud. I always play them on the neck pickups, and they're big and warm, and for the studio they're pretty versatile. You can get a lot of different sounds out of them. They're nice to play, and I like the size of the body and the way it's cut. If I'm playing it every single night, sometimes I struggle with other guitars. I used to really want a Mustang but I just couldn't get to grips with the body. It's strange, the Jazzmaster just seems to totally suit me... and I really love Sonic Youth. I grew up looking at those old beaten-up Jazzmasters."

"Jimmy has been playing Fender Classic Player Jazzmaster Special guitars since the *Holy Fire* album cycle," says Whitcher. "He was looking for a robust touring instrument, the Classic Player suited him well due to the nature of the tune-o-matic bridge and the break angle over the saddles being increased, as the trem system is moved slightly closer to the bridge than on vintage and traditional Jazzmasters.

"He's pretty hard on his guitars, I've seen them go through stage ceilings, strung up on lighting rigs, even being kick flipped... amazingly they always seem to be able to put the guitars back together.

"For the new album campaign, we decided to do a couple of custom colour guitars for Jimmy to take out on the road – he wanted matching headstock models, which are not available in the Classic Player series, so I commissioned the factory in Ensenada to build him a Surf Green and a Faded Sonic Blue (with tortoise shell guard), both are Classic Player Jazzmasters, both with matching headstocks."

Singer Yannis illustrating why Foals continue to be voted one of the best live bands around

it's so much easier to manipulate. It's child's play compared to the Strymon. I've got a [Line 6] DL-4 that I just use for the looper, and that's an awesome pedal, too. Dave Sitek from TV On The Radio, who made our first record, showed me what you can do with it, with the half-time looping and reverse looping... I use that at the end of the chain.

"I use the Boss RV-5 on the modulate setting for *Spanish Sahara* [from debut album *Total Life Forever*] and I really like Earthquaker Devices, because they're really fun. I use their Rainbow Machine, which is a modulated, sort of nightmare pedal that bizarrely makes a sound like a rainbow! You can tune it in and it changes pitch and does these big sweeps and is a soundman's nightmare – it's totally unpredictable. I used it in the studio on [*What Went Down*'s epic closing track], *A Knife In The Ocean* – that big swell that leads into every chorus is that pedal."

New Jersey husband and wife outfit Fuzzrocious Pedals supply Smith and Yannis with their enormous fuzz tones.

"I've got two fuzz pedals from Fuzzrocious. They're a super-small company and their son hand paints all the pedals," says Smith. "We've been using them since the beginning of *Holy Fire* and we've been following his son from basic splurges of colour through to stick men on the last album. I think he's finally learning about painting people now! They're really cool, and I have no idea how to use them because there's no indication of what any of the knobs do. They used to be really big and we got him to make some compact ones, but he neglected to put any kind of signage on them.

> "We've been touring for a decade and been around the world quite a few times. We know what we're doing now"

"You can flick a switch and lose loads of bottom end. I've got two and they're EQ'd differently, so one's quite trebly and one's really growly. I'll use the trebly one on [Holy Fire lead single] *Inhaler* and then in the chorus switch over to the growly one. We both use them, and because of our different guitar and amp set-ups they sound totally different. The combination of all those fuzzes really makes a sort of dream fuzz sound."

Our time with Foals draws to a close as they leave for another airport, another continent and another chapter in the evolution of one of the best bands to emerge from these shores in the past decade. As they prepare to spend most of the next year seeing the world through airport, tourbus and hotel windows, we wonder if they still enjoy life on the road.

"I love touring, and it keeps getting better," replies Smith without hesitation. "We're used to it now and we're experienced. We've been touring for a decade and been around the world quite a few times. We know what we're doing now. You can recognise all the signs of on-tour depression and that kind of thing, and fight it, we all look out for each other and we're really excited.

"It's been a slow, gradual build-up for us. If it had happened any quicker it would have felt weird and maybe disingenuous. We've built this mixture of different fans, and I wouldn't want it any other way."

LISTEN UP

FOALS
What Went Down (2015)
Their most mature record, spanning dark Stooges-like garage rock, funk, California soul and wistful synth pop.

FOALS
Holy Fire (2013)
The album that saw Foals stride from the indie fringes to the mainstream, with *Inhaler* and *My Number* lodging themselves in the collective consciousness.

FOALS
Total Life Forever (2010)
Described by Yannis as "like the sound of the dream of an eagle dying". Worth buying for the majestic, sprawling *Spanish Sahara* alone.

BLUES CUBE

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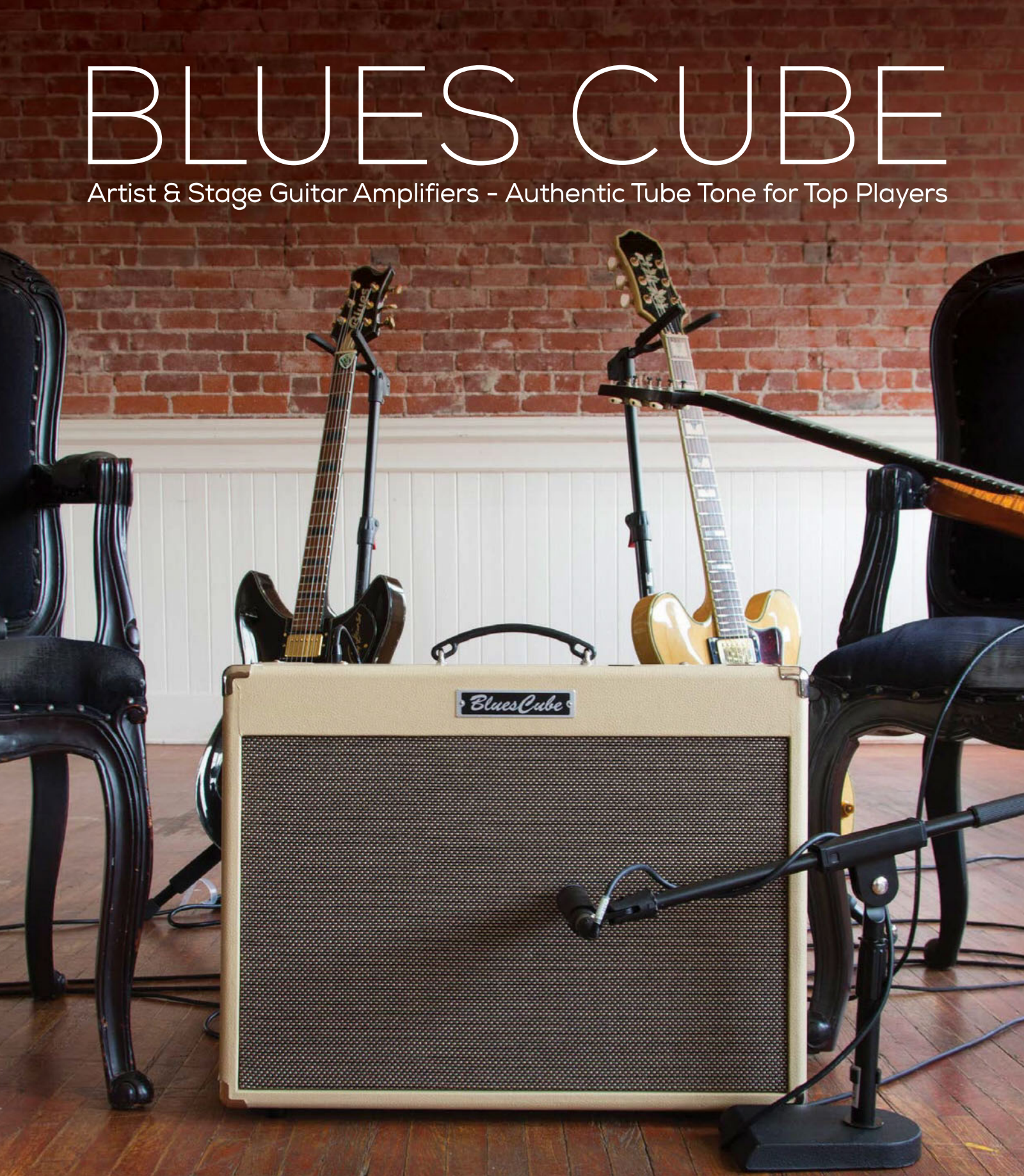

The reinvented Blues Cube series launches the classic 1x12 combo amp into a new era, combining genuine tube sound and response with modern reliability and easy portability. Going far beyond modelling, Roland's Tube Logic design philosophy starts with carefully reproducing the inner workings of the revered tweed-era tube amp in every way, from guitar input to speaker output.

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READER BOARDS

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KIT LIST

Phil Copping

- **PEDALS (IN ORDER)** Into amp's front end: TC Electronic PolyTune Noir, Custom Audio Electronics MC404 wah, Lovepedal Pickle Vibe, Blackstone Overdrive, One Control Anodised Brown Distortion; MarkOne Audio custom footswitch. Into amp's effects loop: Hermida EPH-3 tape delay sim, Hermida Audio Reverb 3, Lovepedal tremolo, Subdecay Spring Theory reverb
- **PATCH CABLES** George L's solderless and custom cables by designacable.com (Sommer cable and Neutrik jacks)
- **POWER SUPPLY** "I've just replaced a Palmer power supply with the seemingly obligatory Voodoo Labs Pedal Power Plus 2. Aside from the extra power options on tap, it sounds 'cleaner' too."
- **BOARD TYPE** "The board itself is a custom tweed-covered beauty from Sgt. Pepper Pedal Boards. It's solidly made and has been great at coping with me drilling almighty holes in it! I love its understated, old-school vibe."
- **HEAR IT HERE** www.facebook.com/hutchandgreen

What inspired this setup?
"Working in my covers duo, Hutch & Green, requires a lot of ground to be covered sonically, and the ability to change these sounds quickly and with little effort (I need to morph from Buddy Holly, through Stevie Wonder to Queen and Led Zeppelin) also dictated the format to a certain extent. So my criteria became: must have as few knobs as possible to be simple and intuitive to operate; must be flexible enough to work as a creative tool in the studio, but also meet the requirements of playing live; must capture the organic sounds of the 50s, 60s and 70s; must be predominantly black and white!"

Tell us a little about the journey...
"I set out on a limited budget with some cheap Mooer pedals, but quickly realised these would be a temporary solution. Over the course of 18 months, I gradually upgraded: the Blackstone overdrive was a massive favourite that I'd owned years ago, so that was a priority – the CAE wah and Subdecay reverb followed. Putting this board together, I realised that the upgraded pedals were all black and white: and, being ever-so slightly OCD, this became the theme! The journey has involved a *lot* of trawling the internet to find the precise pedal for the job. The excellence of the Hermida pedals was a massive revelation to me, too."

Is there another pedal that you are looking to add?
"I've just removed the carry handles originally on the board to make enough room for two more pedals that fill the gaps sonically and in terms of size and colour: the revered Hermida Zendrive for some refined low-to-mid gain overdrive, and the Xotic SP Compressor for general tone shaping and squeezy funk chop."

What guitars and amps do you use with this board?
"My Laney VC30 1x12 is the perfect amp to offer a neutral platform. I like its plummy warmth and punch... It's a bloody loud 30 watts! My two guitars are 'Eve': an original Gibson Blueshawk, a really soulful and tonally versatile player, and 'Beryl': a heavily modded LTD ST-203, complete with upgraded hardware."

What lessons have you learned along the way?
"It's been interesting because of the limitations of size and colour! I guess it has paid to be incredibly patient in the search. Having a wooden board has resulted in some unusual solutions to cable routing. My biggest 'finds' were solderless panel jacks (from Terralec) and extra grommets set in the board's surface. I've learnt a lot about the importance of pedal placement, too: getting the pedals you use the least out of the way. I also experimented with combinations of reverb and tremolo, and found I got the coolest variations of sound by sandwiching the Lovepedal tremolo between two reverb pedals! Know the sound you want in your head and accept no compromise!"

Guitar & Bass SHOW US YOUR BOARD

To be in with a chance of seeing your pedalboard in the mag, either post a picture on our Facebook page via this link **http://bit.ly/showusyourpedalboard** or email **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com**

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SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE

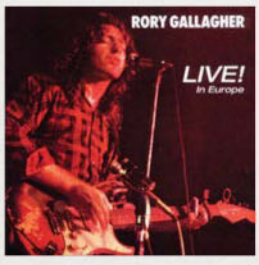
Vivian Campbell

Def Leppard and former Dio man selects the records that sent him on his guitar journey

Belfast-born Last In Line and Def Leppard guitarist Vivian Campbell has been playing the instrument since he was 12. He joined Sweet Savage at the age of 15 before being recruited by Dio in 1983, playing on the album *Holy Diver*. Spells in Whitesnake, Riverdogs and Shadow King followed before Campbell joined Def Leppard in 1992 after the death of Steve Clark. He has also played live with Thin Lizzy and released a solo album, *Two Sides Of It*, in 2005.

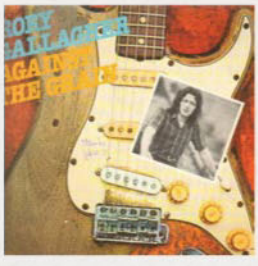
Last In Line's debut album, Heavy Crown, is released by Frontiers Music SRL on Friday, 19 February. The band features three original members of Dio – Vivian Campbell (guitar), Vinny Appice (drums) and Jimmy Bain (bass), and new vocalist Andrew Freeman. For more info, head to www.lastinlineofficial.com

Rory Gallagher
LIVE IN EUROPE



"This was the first album I ever had. Prior to that, the only records I'd heard were my sister's T. Rex singles. Dropping the needle on that record was my first guitar influence. I picked up a lot of my early guitar-playing habits from Rory; it's ingrained in my DNA. I blame my two greatest guitar heroes – Rory and Gary Moore – for my bad habits!"

Rory Gallagher
AGAINST THE GRAIN



"The *Irish Tour '74* record was another big one for me, because I saw that tour. It was a phenomenal show and a great introudction to live concerts. It made me want to go out and buy his studio albums, like *Against The Grain*, a big record for me, and then *Calling Card*. If I had to go with one over the other, I'd go for *Against The Grain*."

Lynyrd Skynyrd
PRONOUNCED 'LEH-'NÉRD 'SKIN-'NÉRD

"This was gifted to me for Christmas in 1973. I'd never heard of them, absorbed this record and became fascinated by their guitar players. It sent me on an excursion to my local record shop every Saturday trying to find more Southern rock. My brief foray immersing myself in Southern rock was basically this album. I never found anything to equal it."

Thin Lizzy
BLACK ROSE

"At around the time I was getting into Lynyrd Skynyrd, I was starting to discover Lizzy. I was so into Gary Moore at the time and he featured so heavily on the album. The track *Black Rose* was such a challenge to learn as a guitar player, such an epic. It's not only a great song and a great, great lyric from Phil Lynott, but absolute rip-your-face-off guitar playing."

Thin Lizzy
LIVE AND DANGEROUS

"Everyone should have this on their list. As a guitar-playing teenager, it was the ulitmate. It enocmpasses everything that was great about Thin Lizzy. Growing up in Belfast in the 70s, I didn't see a lot of bands, as barely anyone would play there. The only two who really did were Rory Gallagher and Thin Lizzy – fortunatley they were both great live acts."

Deep Purple
COME TASTE THE BAND

"I was never really a huge Deep Purple fan, but *Come Taste The Band* turned out to be my favourite of their records, and it sounds nothing like them. It's got Tommy Bolin and Glenn Hughes and David Coverdale, it's not the original sound of Deep Purple at all. I like Tommy Bolin's phrasing. He had that funky element, and I've incorporated a little of that into my playing."

Horslips
THE TÁIN

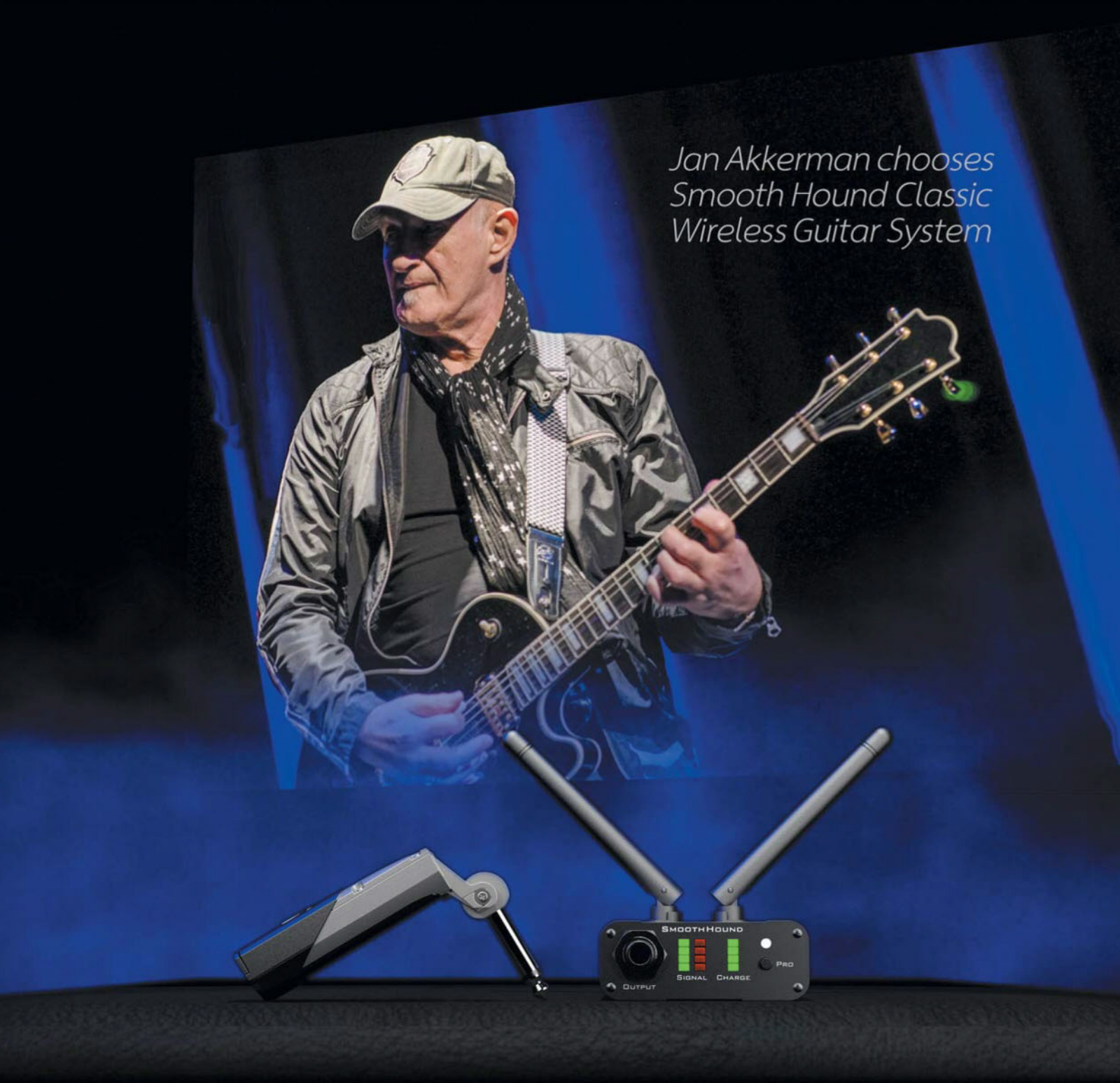
"They were a Dublin band from the 70s, a sort of fusion between rock and traditional Irish music. They had a great guitar player, called Johnny Fean. This was their first album and a big record for me. *Dearg Doom* is the song that stands out, it's all around a big raw guitar riff that carries the song. It's one of the first riffs I learnt how to play, too."

Gary Moore
BACK ON THE STREETS

"I totally absorbed that album, coming off the heels of what he did with Jon Hiseman and Colosseum. There's a lot of jazzy fusion playing, but yet you have Phil Lynott who came in and sang and wrote a few songs. I never heard Gary Moore play anything like he didn't mean it. Gary played the guitar like he wanted to fucking kill it every time he played."

UFO
LIGHTS OUT

"As much as I appreciated Michael Schenker, and still do, I never sat down and studied him in the way I did Rory and Gary. Aggressive guitar playing for me has to be married to a great song and a great band, it can't be just fret wanking, so that's why I was always more drawn towards Lizzy and UFO and that kind of stuff. This is the pinnacle of UFO's songwriting."



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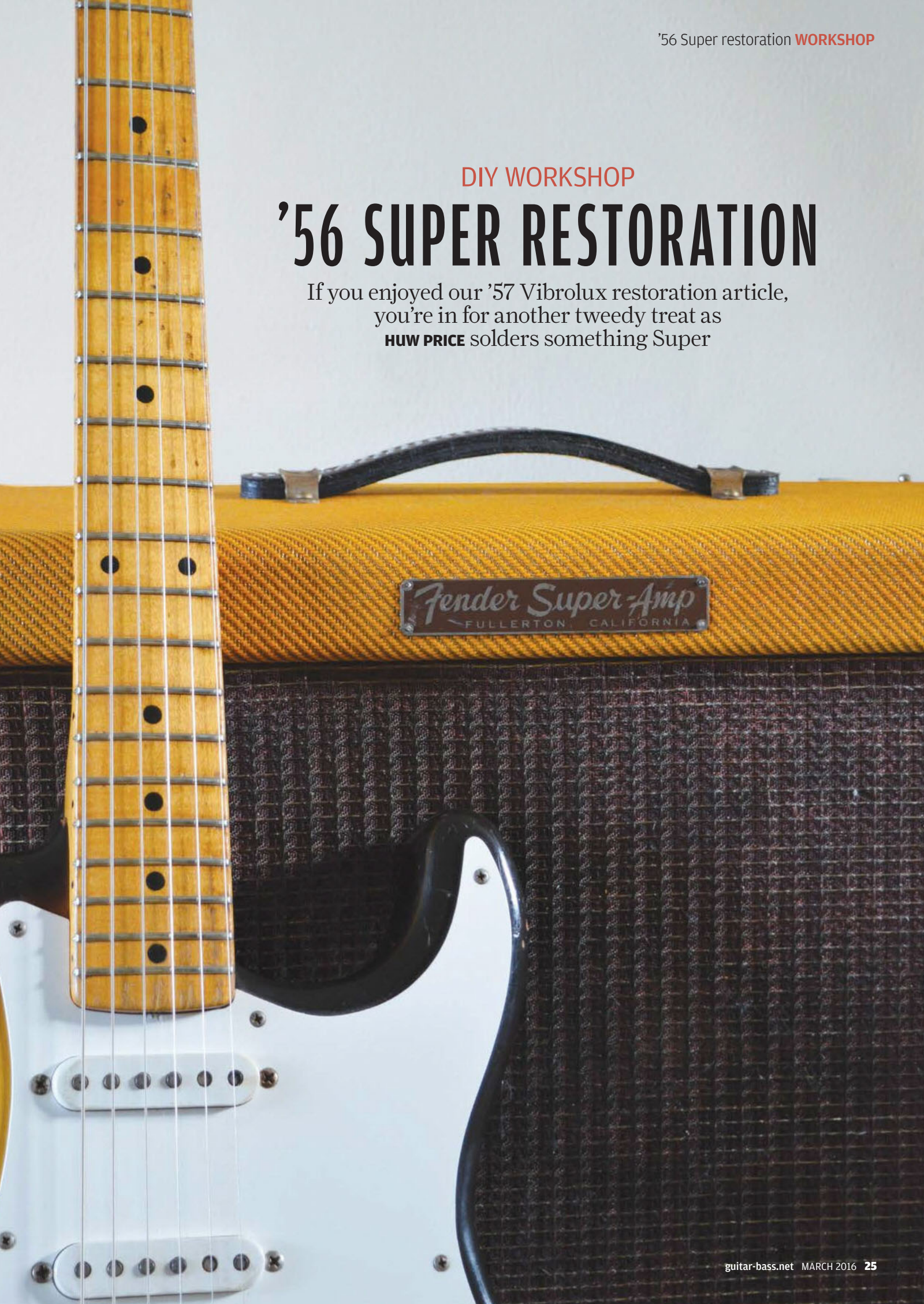
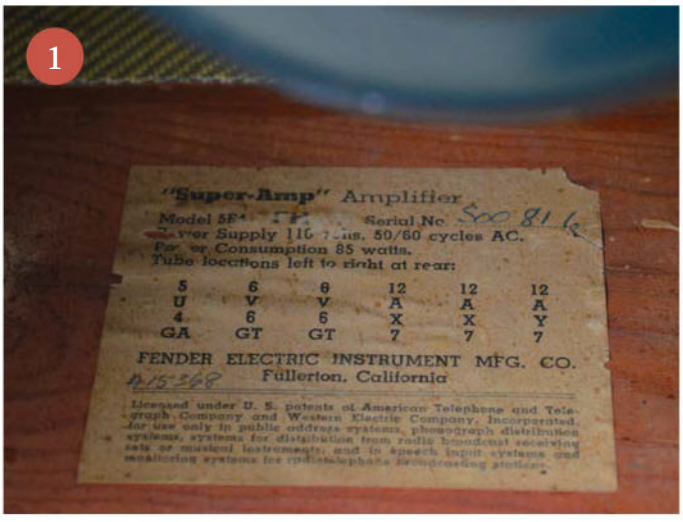
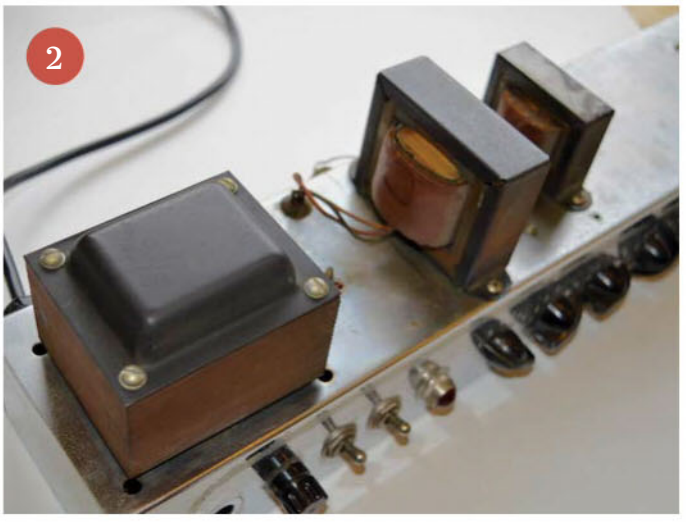
DIY WORKSHOP

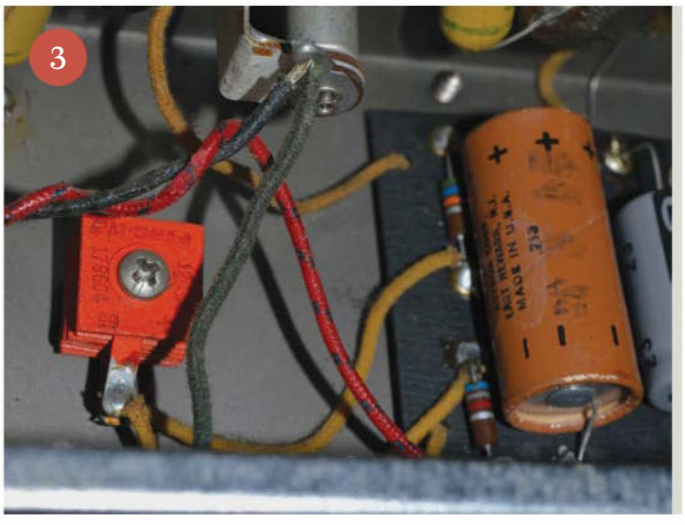
'56 SUPER RESTORATION

If you enjoyed our '57 Vibrolux restoration article, you're in for another tweedy treat as **HUW PRICE** solders something Super









1 The serial number on the tube chart matches the stamped number on the amp chassis and the 'FH' stamp denotes August 1956. A 5E4 should have a 12AY7 in the second position, but this chart specifies a 12AX7

2 The power transformer on the left is an 8160, the choke is a 14684 and the output transformer on the right is an 1848. All three are original and correct for 5E4 and 5E4-A Fender Supers

3 The bias components include the red square selenium diode and the fat orange 100uF capacitor. The resistor at the top is a correct-spec 56K, but the 6K8 resistor shouldn't be there

4 The mains wires are connected either side of the ground switch on the left and the 'death cap' is lurking beneath. The other yellow cap is connected to the standby switch. It's not shown on the 5E4 or 5E4-A schematic but appears on the 5F4 schematic

Forgive me for starting this workshop with a shameless name drop. For reasons totally unrelated to *G&B*, I recently found myself spending an afternoon with Joe Bonamassa. The conversation turned to guitars and amps and he let slip that he plays tweed Fender Supers at home.

Joe described how the late-50s Super, Bandmaster and Pro models all share the same circuit but, in his words, the Super is "the one to get". The differences between these amps are the output transformers, feedback components and speaker configurations, but all are more or less lower-powered versions of the late-50s Bassmans and Twins Joe currently plays on stage. The Super is the smallest and rarest of the bunch; it was also Leo Fender's personal favourite – and many vintage tweed aficionados share his opinion.

Treble and bass controls allow more tone shaping than you get with smaller tweeds such as the Princeton, Harvard and Deluxe. Better still, around 30 watts of power through a pair of 10-inch speakers makes a Super loud enough to use with a drummer and you can still crank one up for tube overdrive at smaller gigs. The only downside is that they can be expensive and hard to find.

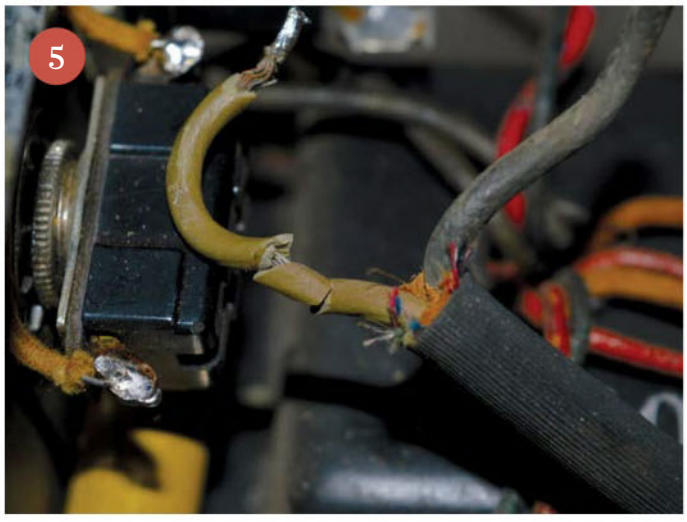
I relayed this conversation to my mate Ed. He's a huge Bonamassa fan who contracted a serious tweed bug when I fixed up his '57 Vibrolux in the October issue of *G&B*. What followed was a period of research, which largely involved me poring over schematics while Ed sent over forum links and YouTube demos. I probably shouldn't have been surprised when he eventually showed up with a tweed Super and asked me to 'sort it out'.

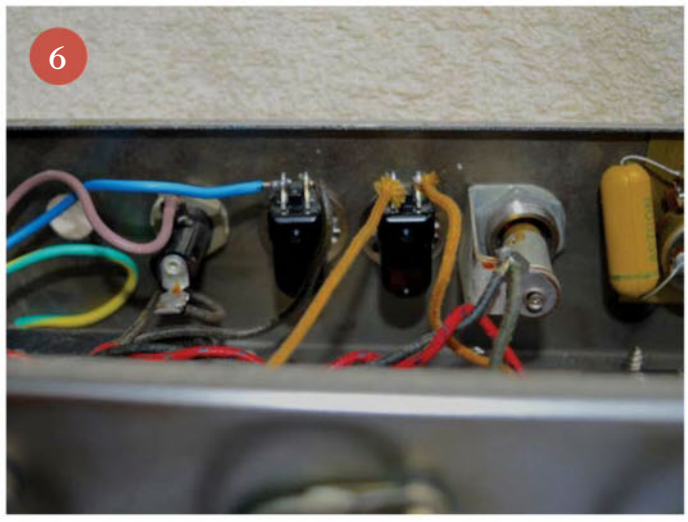
What the hell is this thing?

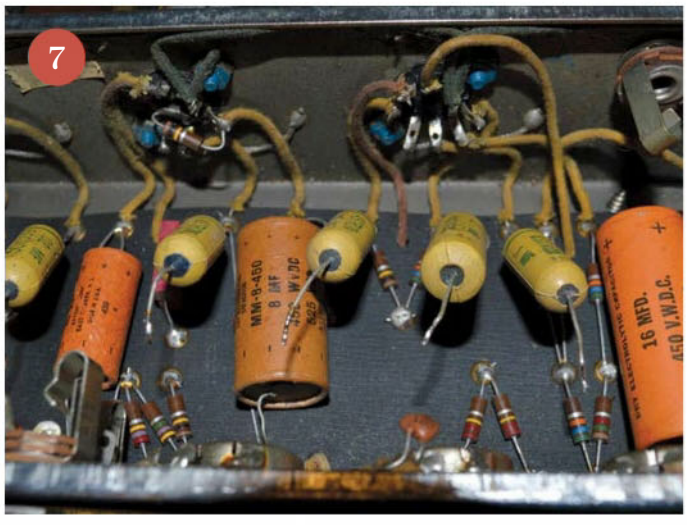
Vintage Fender amp model designations can be confusing, but they work something like this: the model codes were usually written or stamped onto a tube chart that was pasted to an inside wall of the cabinet. If the first digit is a 5, this tells you it was made in the 50s. The second digit is a letter, which tells you which model amp you're dealing with, and the final digit is a number that corresponds with the model name.

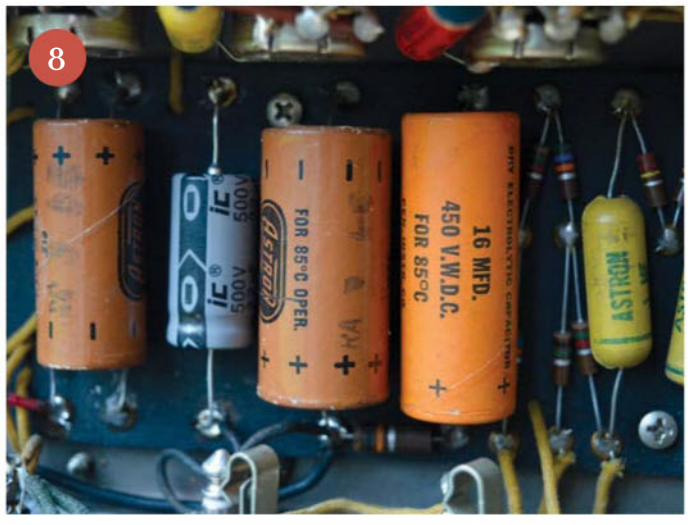
A number 3 corresponds with Deluxe amps, so a tweed Deluxe made around 1950 would be a 5A3. As the Deluxe evolved throughout the decade, the model designation changed to 5B3, 5C3, 5D3 and finally the famous 5E3. The number 4 corresponds to a Super and the tube chart code on Ed's example reads 5E4 followed by the letters 'FH', which means a manufacturing date of August 1956 1.

Packing a pair of fixed bias 6L6 power valves meant Supers were a step up from the Deluxe, but for a brief period in early 1956 Supers









were equipped with 6V6s. The 22-watt 6V6 Super had two models – the 5E4 and 5E4-A. Having examined the schematics, the only difference seems to be a change in the value of the resistor connecting the bias resistor to the output transformer from 22K to 18K.

The 6V6 Supers preceded the final 5F4 version, for which Fender reverted to 6L6s with a beefier power transformer, a 12AX7 in the second preamp stage and another resistor change from 18K to 6K8. In all other respects, the circuits were identical.

Ed's Super combines features from the earlier 5E4-A and the 5F4. The tube chart does specify 6V6 power valves, but also the 12AY7/12AX7/12AX7 preamp valve configuration of the 5F4. It has the Triad 8160 power transformer associated with the 6V6-loaded 5E4-A, but the bias resistor is a 6L6-spec 6K8. The 5F4 schematic showed a 0.05uF capacitor connected between the standby switch and ground. It's not shown on the 5E4-A schematic, but even so this Super had the standby switch cap. My guess is it's a transitional version of the 5E4-A, which was itself a transitional model.

Safety first

Working on valve amplifiers can be lethal and it's most risky when they're not earthed. Ed's amp arrived with its original two-conductor mains cable, so I had to replace it with a modern twin and earth mains cable before starting any other work.

Tweed amps of this era have a ground switch that is coupled to a capacitor 4. This capacitor is popularly known as the 'death cap' because if it fails there's a possibility you will be electrocuted. That capacitor needs to be removed and the ground switch will be taken out of circuit, but before doing anything you must ensure the amp is not connected to the mains supply and all the capacitors have been discharged 5.

The trickiest part is removing the original cable. The strain relief collar must be squeezed with pliers inside the chassis then pushed through the hole. Once removed, it should come off the cable easily and you will be able to reuse it.

I exposed about 10cm of the conductors then stripped about 5mm of insulation from the ends to expose the copper. I tinned the ends with solder then soldered the ground wire to a sturdy tag and clasped it firmly to the chassis using one of the power transformer bolts. The live and neutral wires were soldered directly to the fuse holder and the power switch 6.

It's also worth noting that the original mains cable's insulation had dried out and started to disintegrate. If you prefer to see vintage amps with original mains cable, I wish you luck. >

5 The mains cable insulation was rotting away and flaking off. Some collectors prefer to leave the original mains cable and death cap intact. *G&B* wishes them all good luck with that

6 The new mains cable is soldered directly onto the power switch and fuse holder, and the ground switch and death cap have been removed. The standby switch capacitor was installed to eliminate switching noise. Having a 60-year-old capacitor with 415v at one end and the chassis at the other seemed reckless, so out it came

7 The grid ends of these Astron coupling caps were lifted to test for leakage. They all turned out to be leaky and were replaced

8 Of the three filter caps that came with the amp, only one was original, and that was showing signs of blistering. The grey one wasn't even of the correct value

9 The preamp coupling capacitors have been replaced with Tube Amp Doctor paper/oil types, along with the 25uF electrolytic caps that bias the preamp tubes. The orange 8uF capacitor is original and tested well, but that will probably be retired in the near future

Health check

The amp was working when it arrived and sounded strong and loud. However, it was a bit crackly and the overdrive had a slightly raspy quality with an uneven decay. Initially, we assumed the original Jensen speakers were shagged out, but trying the Super through an external cabinet showed that the problems lay inside the amp.

Having installed an earthed mains cable, I felt safe enough to run some preliminary health checks. All the voltages tested higher than the values specified on the schematic, but within Fender's margins of tolerance. The schematic shows 385v immediately after the choke, but I was reading 435v, which is quite high for 6V6s. Even so, further research revealed that the high voltages in this amp were pretty standard for a 5E4-A.

Ideally, I'd like to be able to keep those beautiful Astron coupling capacitors, but leaky capacitors can degrade tone and damage an amp. To test for leakage, I de-soldered the grid ends of the Astrons then connected each exposed end to ground via a 1M resistor **7**.

A digital multimeter can then be used to read the voltage across the 1M resistor, and if you see one volt or more, you can conclude the cap is leaky and should be replaced. All the Astron coupling caps in this amp were very leaky. I own a device that tests capacitance value and leakage of electrolytics. Since it tests for leakage only at very low voltage rather than the high voltages found in valve amps, I take the readings with a pinch of salt. However, it can tell me if an electrolytic capacitor value has drifted and by how much. You should never test electrolytics without first disconnecting the amp from the mains and discharging all the capacitors **8**.

Capacitor swaps

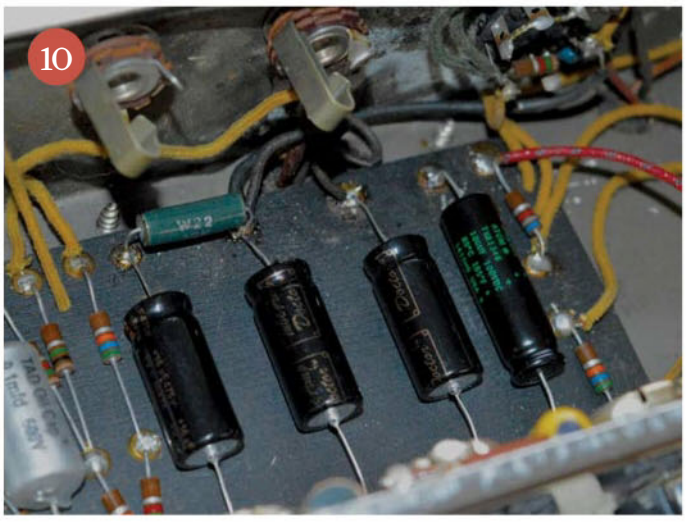
Since the Astrons were all being replaced, we decided to swap out the electrolytics too. Naturally, the original components would be kept safe in case a future owner might want to reinstall them, but keeping Ed safe was my priority.

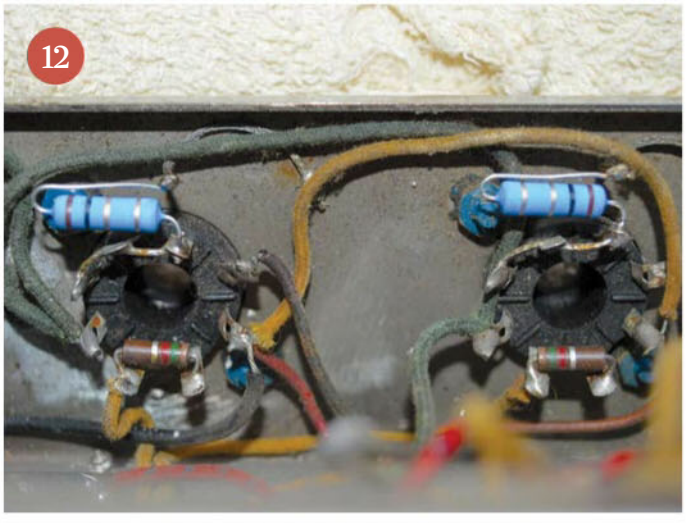
Incidentally, I asked Joe Bonamassa if he thought running vintage Fender amps night after night on tour was a bit risky. Apparently, once his vintage tweeds have been restored with modern capacitors and so forth, he has found them to be more reliable than any clone or reissue.

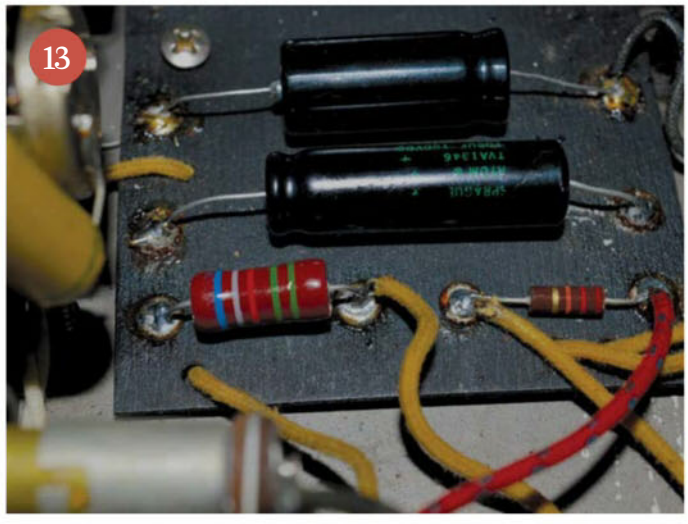
Ed intends to gig with his Super, so renewing components was an easy call. The Astron coupling caps were replaced with the same Tube Amp Doctor (TAD) paper/oil caps I used in Ed's Vibrolux. I have always been happy with Sprague Atom electrolytics, but the TAD electrolytics had garnered some positive reviews and were much cheaper. Having been pleased with the paper oils, I decided to give the TAD electrolytics a try.

I started by swapping out the Astrons and the preamp electrolytics, then I took a listen **9**. The improvement was immediately apparent, with much smoother and creamier overdrive and a sweeter midrange. The edgy treble was also gone, but the Super was still sounding bright and open. I powered down, drained the capacitors and replaced all the filter caps and the bias cap.

While I was at it, I replaced the 10K carbon composite resistor in







the power supply with a 22-watt wire wound. I figured the original had endured a tough 60 years and deserved a happy retirement 10.

I tested all the electrolytics when they were removed. None were close to their specified values and two were double. Listening once again, the Super was running quieter and I was really feeling the touch compression that I enjoy from low- and mid-power tweeds.

Bias time

On fixed bias amps, I like to install 1-ohm resistors between the cathodes of the power valves and ground. Measuring the resistance across the resistor gives an indication of how the valves are biased and how closely they're balanced. Having installed two 1-ohm resistors, I found the voltages across the cathode resistors were mismatched 11 & 12.

This doesn't necessarily mean that there's anything wrong with the valves, but if you swap over the power valves and the cathode resistor voltages move with the valves, you can reasonably assume they're out of balance. I put in a matched pair and the voltages balanced up, but the plate voltages were still quite high and the bias seemed way off.

Rather than swapping the 56K bias resistor, I decided to see what would happen if I replaced the 6K8 resistor that, according to the circuit diagrams, should have been a 22K or an 18K. With a 22K, the 6V6 plate voltages fell to 390v, and all the other voltages were pretty much bang-on throughout the amp.

Although I was reading 25mV across the cathode resistors with my own pair of GEC 6V6s, Ed's Sylvania 6V6s ran a tad hotter at 27mV. I installed a 68K resistor in place of the 56K and all was well. After dialling in the bias and sorting the voltages, the Super sounded sweeter and smoother 13.

Mid mod

The Super has ample treble and bass. It's chimey, airy, cutting and outstanding with humbucker-equipped guitars. However, the mids sound slightly scooped and some may crave the chewy midrange grind of a tweed Deluxe. Although I have no qualms about swapping tired and potentially dangerous components, I would never drill a hole in a control plate to install a midrange control. I also wanted to avoid messing with the original circuit.

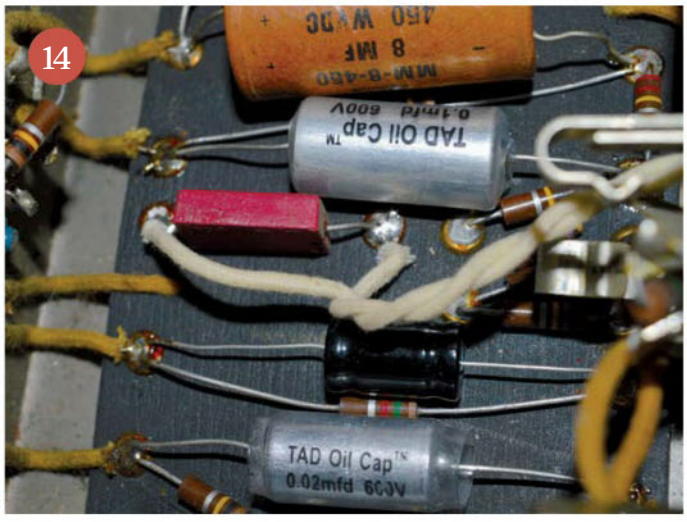
There's a simple mid-boost modification for Baxandall-type tone stacks such as the Super's: simply place a 500pF or 1000pF capacitor in parallel with the 0.00025uF capacitor that's tied to the treble control 14. I obtained a three-way on/off/on switch and, using two 500v silver mica capacitors, I got two preset levels of mid boost and, with the switch in the centre position, the circuit

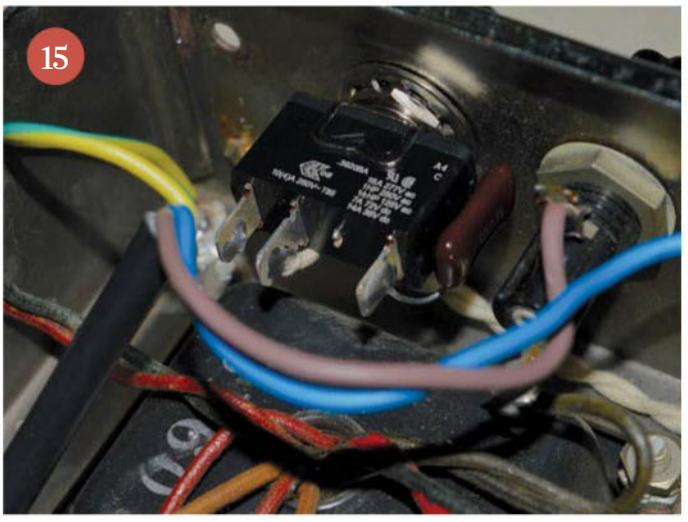
10 The three black capacitors on the left are 16uF Tube Amp Doctor electrolytics. The capacitor on the right is a Sprague Atom 100uF electrolytic in the bias circuit

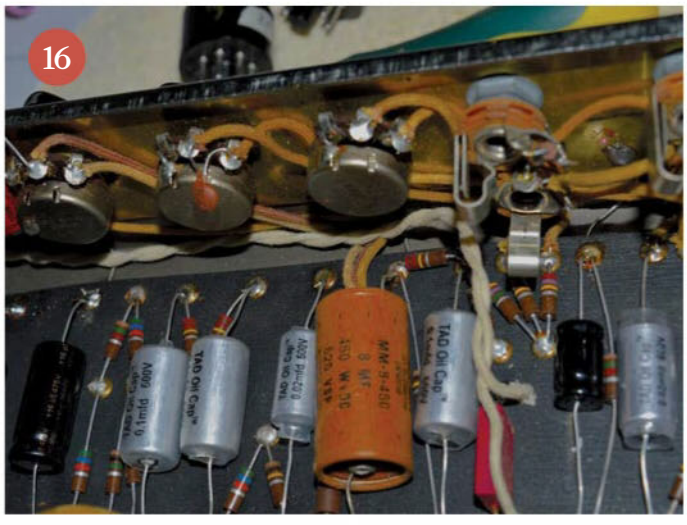
11 The power valves have fixed bias rather than cathode bias, so the cathode pins are connected directly to the chassis ground by these braided wires

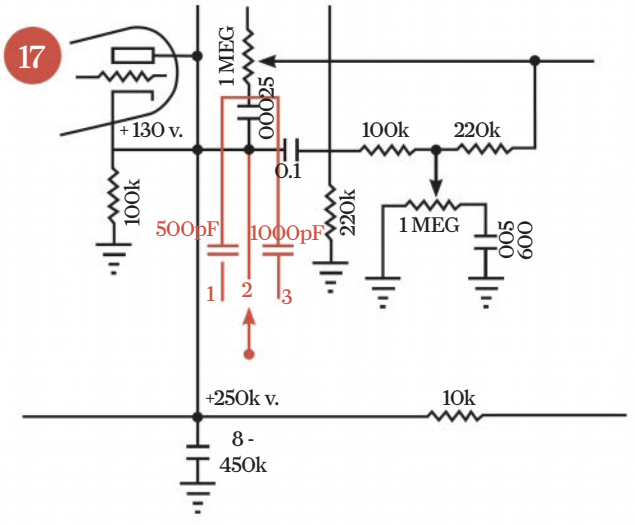
12 The braided wires were snipped close to the solder tags on the valve bases and 1-ohm resistors connected between the cathode tags and ground. The resistors don't effect the running of the amp, but measuring voltage drop across them will give an idea of the bias setting and how well they're matched. You can leave them in after servicing the amp or remove them

13 Changing the 6K8 resistor to the specified 22K sorted out the biasing. For Ed's pair of Sylvania 6V6s, the 56K bias resistor was upped to 68K to hit a bias point of 25mA









14 The red box is the 0.00025uF capactor tied to the treble control. For the fat boost mod a wire was soldered to each end of this capacitor

15 A three-way switch with a centre off position was installed in the hole vacated by the ground switch. Make sure the shaft fits the hole properly and the switch can handle the current and voltage

16 The two wires from the red box cap were twisted together and connected to the centre tag of the switch and capacitors. Having the switch so far away wasn't ideal, but running the wires adjacent to the board rather than along the top of the control pots and positioning the mains wires well away keeps noise down

17 500pF and 1000pF silver mica capacitors were soldered to the outer lugs of the three-way switch and their leadout wires were soldered together. The switch selects two levels of fat boost and the centre position disengages the boost

reverts to stock. Best of all, the switch can be installed in place of the ground switch, so the amp appears unmodified 15 & 16.

Verdict

Re-tweeding a 50s Fender amp is similar to refinishing a vintage guitar. Neither has any effect on tone and both make things much more affordable. Had Ed's amp remained untouched since it left the factory, the price would have been at least double what he paid. The cost of this Super was more or less in line with that of a brand new amp from a boutique US builder.

Various factors contribute to the tone of vintage amps, and I feel transformers, valves and speakers are more significant than capacitors and resistors. When you consider that capacitor failure can destroy valves and vintage transformers, it seems daft to risk expensive and irreplaceable components in order to preserve cheap electronic components that Leo Fender would have expected owners to change in the course of routine maintenance.

With its re-tweed, broken handle and black painted speaker cloth, this electronic restoration is unlikely to have further dented the Super's appeal to collectors. However, it has radically improved the sound; and now it's safe to use its owner has no need to feel nervous about gigging with it. After all, that's why he bought it.

I can understand why someone such as Bonamassa would choose to play through a tweed Super. After getting to know this amp, if I could afford any tweed Fender from the 50s I would probably choose a 5E4-A. It has everything I like about medium-power 6V6 tweeds, coupled with extended headroom, tonal range and volume. Even the old Jensens sound fantastic, and with two of them handling the power, they don't sound loose or overly compressed.

This Super is incredibly touch-sensitive and you can get shimmery mid-scooped cleans, creamy overdrive and ferociously fat grind at sensible volume levels. It brings out the best from every guitar you plug into it. Although it needed some work, Ed has got a piece of Fender history that will most likely increase rather than decrease in value as he enjoys using it.

PARTS LIST & SUPPLIERS

- **Mains plug – RS Components Stock No 316-0133**
- **3-way on/off/on switch – RS Components Stock No 8610286**
- **TAD paper/oil capacitors – Hotrox**
- **TAD electrolytic & silver mica capacitors – Allparts UK**
- **Sprague electrolytic capacitors – Hotrox**

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No Substitute For Class

Following the release of a new 'definitive' hits collection, *Accept No Substitute*, charting the band's six decades in music, we speak to Francis Rossi and Rick Parfitt as Status Quo hit the road again...

Story **Lars Mullen**

When Rick Parfitt speaks to *Guitar & Bass* from his home in Spain on the eve of Status Quo's Accept No Substitute UK tour, the band are taking advantage of some enforced downtime to carry out the daunting task of compiling a definitive setlist from 32 albums of material.

"I'm actually resting up from a recent hefty shoulder operation," says Parfitt. "For the last three years, I've had several pulled ligaments and split tendons. I've been told recovery time is six months, but that ain't gonna happen.

"I've never done what I was told, so why change now? I haven't picked up a guitar for a month, but I'll probably start playing again in about a week, as the arm is getting stronger."

A call to co-guitarist and frontman Francis Rossi, with whom Parfitt has been sharing a stage for over half a century, confirms he's also been enjoying the band's recent inactivity. Reflecting on the process of honing the setlist for last December's tour – which will be followed by a series of outdoor shows in the UK and Switzerland in May, July and August – and selecting tracks for the 3-CD 'greatest hits' album released last autumn, he explains: "There's a lot of material to choose from, and I think the package is rather good. I'm pleased it has material that recognises the band's latter years as well, when I think we've recorded some of our best songs. There's also a lot of nostalgic stuff from the early Quo years and the Frantic 4; but I don't think the new band was great and the old one shite, or vice versa, which some of the early hardcore fans said when we did the Frantics – I can't help but disagree with that."

The Quo continue to put significant effort into rehearsing for live work. "We always find the UK tour a pressure, I really don't know why, and the Accept No Substitute tour is no exception," says Rossi. "The adulation and the feeling onstage in the venues are tremendous, but I enjoy walking up to my bedroom in the back of the bus afterwards, it's like anyone else who finishes work for the day. We'll rehearse the songs and there may be some tweaks here and there. There was a time when Rick had the idea of opening with *Down Down*; it seemed good on paper, but about 10 shows in, he said 'you were right, it doesn't work'. If we put *Caroline* in the middle it becomes positively pedestrian, but at the front it's urgent, so why would we put it somewhere else? You learn in showbiz how a set should work, what keys follow what beats – a shuffle or a straight eight for example. We do seem to have it down to the ultimate, but we will rehearse the crap out if it, believe me."

> "This is a must-have for the serious Quo fan and for floating fans that come to see us"
> **RICK PARFITT**

Parfitt (left) and Rossi have been united by Status Quo since 1963

"This is a must-have for the serious Quo fan and for the floating fans that come to see us now and again," says Parfitt of *Accept No Substitute*. "It's like a timeline – I look at the pictures, especially from the 70s, and see what we were up to and the fun we had recording certain albums, I can't believe it's around 32 now. I didn't like to change from vinyl to CD, but it was inevitable; it had to come, like everything else that was leaping forward. It just didn't suit our sound, but we've adapted to it now and can compensate for it being so clean; but there was something special about vinyl that suited Quo so well."

Quo have also witnessed big changes in the live arena since they started gigging in the 60s. "It's all technical now," says Rossi. "There's no desk, you adjust it all on a screen, but we are all in the same boat so we just have to get on with it. It's just not so natural as it used to be, it really annoys me now with some of these so-called boy and girl bands and other people in our business who get away with murder; there's no need to be able to sing, play or do anything anymore – they go out, fill an arena and mime to backing tracks. If we go back to the early days, you had to be able to perform and do it well or you wouldn't last – I guess that still relates to us.

"Back then, nobody really gave a fuck, we just all piled in one studio room, sat in a circle and looked at each other with the amps up really loud. A lot of overspill down the mics played a big part in our sound on vinyl, but those days are long gone now and they'll never come back. It was a great

The current line-up (left to right): Leon Cave, Andy Bown, Rick Parfitt, Francis Rossi, John 'Rhino' Edwards

experience to record in a way that seemed so natural. I'm not sure, though, if digital was to blame or we were just drifting off. In the early 80s, everyone was using different reverbs, big snare drum sounds and synths; you can see where we followed, then whoops – we'd drift back and forth again. Around the mid-90s, we got it back. We were even told we were drifting when we did the *Rocking All Over The World* album; it's difficult to progress in a band like Quo, because a lot of fans don't want it to move, maybe it was because they had such great times back then."

Rossi has fond memories of 2014's Frantic 4 reunion tour, which saw Rossi and Parfitt reunited onstage with Alan Lancaster and John Coghlan. "I must admit, the Frantic 4 tour was very nostalgic," he says. "I looked up at the crowd on the balcony at the London Hammersmith gig, it looked like they were mesmerised at something that was going on behind the band. I thought, 'what the fuck are they looking at?'. I've never, ever experienced euphoria from an audience like that before, maybe they wished we'd stayed in that era and just released albums of all those tunes one after another.

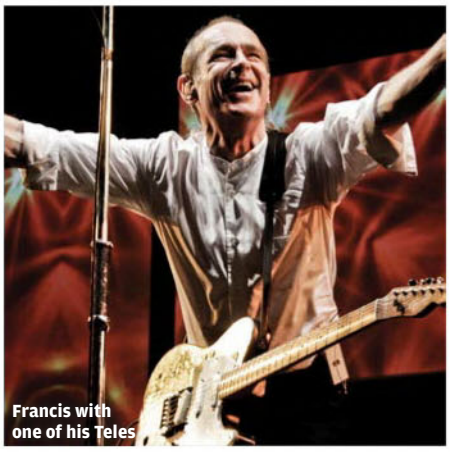
"The classic Quo albums would always have a ballad here and there that Rick wrote, like *Living On An Island* for example, or Alan Lancaster would lean towards Del Shannon, and the blues and country feel from myself and Bob Young.

"With albums like *Pile Driver*, *Hello Quo!* and *On The Level*, I think we'd reached a point. Then when heavy rock was out there, you had to put a fist in the air, get a tattoo and pull a face, but that was never really Quo.

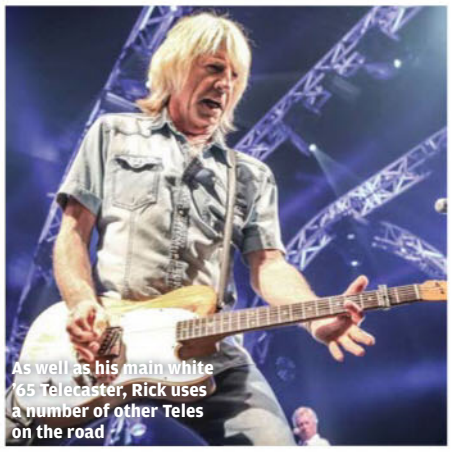
"I miss those days when we could just make a record. The best thing about *Bula Quo!* was it wasn't a Quo album, just songs from the movie, which was fine; we could do anything at that point, then we had to come back to do something in the Quo vein."

Rossi dismisses the oft-repeated notion that Status Quo songs are all simplistic reworkings of the same three-chord forumla.

"I heard someone say on the radio recently that Quo was the same song with the same three chords," he says. "If we had been Berry Gordy we'd have got an entire record company and a lot of other bands to do it, at least Quo did it within one band. I'm not being negative about Tamla Motown, but it's


Francis with one of his Teles

Status Quo in recent live action


As well as his main white '65 Telecaster, Rick uses a number of other Teles on the road

all the same backing tracks and sounds with different acts on the top, so whilst us humans say we want something different all the time, we don't; it's the same with everything in our lives, hence you can go anywhere around the planet and get a McDonalds or a Burger King."

Rossi admits to initially having reservations about the band's 2014 acoustic album – *Aquostic (Stripped Bare)*. "It was totally different of course," he says. "First, I thought, 'It's acoustic, where's that thing that we love about Quo gone?', then I'm thinking, 'This is good innit?'. I realised that a lot of the songs that I may have slagged off over the years have lovely little melodies, and people were coming up to us saying they didn't know we wrote such nice songs. I don't know what they've been listening to then," he laughs. "I enjoyed it immensely and would like to take it further, as the full-blown rock set is physically getting harder, and like a lot of rock bands we struggle with the decibel limit. I have a fucking lawnmower at home that has '97 decibels' written on the side, this is close to the live venue limit and I'm thinking, 'Is this how loud we are now?'. I have sensitive hearing, that's why I use the in-ear monitoring. I think as I've gotten older, I've sweetened it a little, whilst Rick didn't take to in-ear, his ears are dulling, he's got louder and brighter on stage."

> "I just want to give the guitar a good bash to make sure all is well, then go out and play it quite loud"
>
> FRANCIS ROSSI

The Quo have also waded through decades of technology changes within live sound, but Rossi someitmes yearns for a return to more simple times. "We get asked if we could drop in and do a gig with just a guitar and an amp, but it's not like that anymore, in a way I wish it was," he says. "What goes on behind the line of Marshalls is all highly technical, which I don't really understand. There are racks of stuff; sometimes it hisses and hums or cuts out, and I'm thinking 'there are millions of pounds of equipment here that does this and that, why don't we get rid of it all?' I'm a simple man when it comes to rock 'n' roll,

ON TOUR WITH QUO

Lloyd Gilbert has been guitar tech for Rick Parfitt and Francis Rossi for the last 10 years. "We take eight guitars on tour," he says. "These include Francis's grey custom-built Status Graphite as a back-up to his green model, which is more or less a hybrid Tele carved from a slab of ash with a graphite neck, stop tailpiece and loaded with three Hot Rails pickups. The Graphite guitars are working well, although I don't think we've seen the last of the original green '59 Fender. Rick also has a back-up red Status Graphite Slipstream.

"Rick's number one is still his well-worn '62 Tele, which he plays with such ferocity that it often comes back covered in blood. He plays mostly over the lower DAE strings, with the guitar on an acute angle, so his strumming hand, especially his third finger, catches the edge of the Tele's cut-down ashtray bridge.

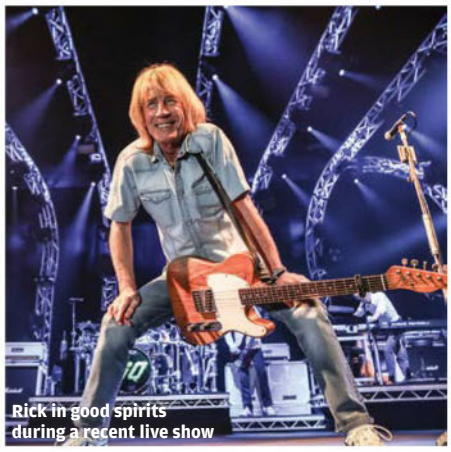
"It's been strung with 14-56 gauge strings with a 26-wound G for over 40 years, and I've never had any trouble with the neck. I've strung other Teles with this string gauge and had a banana for a neck before reaching pitch. We also have a '57 Esquire in open G with a capo at the second fret, which Rick uses for the likes of *Rain* and *Mystery Song*. Rick also has a back-up '62 Tele in regular tuning, on which he'll drop tune the low E to D onstage for *Whatever You Want*.

"It's amazing how the old Teles have survived so much punishment over the years; I've likened them to Francis with the Rolls Royce, as he has a lighter touch, and Rick with the rugged Land Rover!"

For more information on the Accept No Substitute UK tour and the *Accept No Substitute: The Definitive Hits* 3-CD and 2-DVD package, see the band's website at www.statusquo.co.uk

Francis with his T-shape Status Graphite...

...and playing one of his many Teles


Rick in good spirits during a recent live show

I don't want any of that bollocks, I don't understand it. I just want to give the guitar a good bash backstage to make sure all is well, then go out and fucking play it quite loud, then I'm happy – it don't take a lot! We still use a combination of Vox and Marshall amps. I have the Marshalls coming straight at me on stage, which is mixed with a Vox AC30 in an isolation box behind the backline."

Hardcore Quo fans will also have noticed a recent guitar change on stage, as Rossi explains: "I suddenly started to get serious tuning problems with the green Tele. Rick plays a lot of route and fifths and I put a lot of thirds into the chords, which can sound really sour if it's not bang in tune. It's back at Fender with Mark Preston, their custom guy.

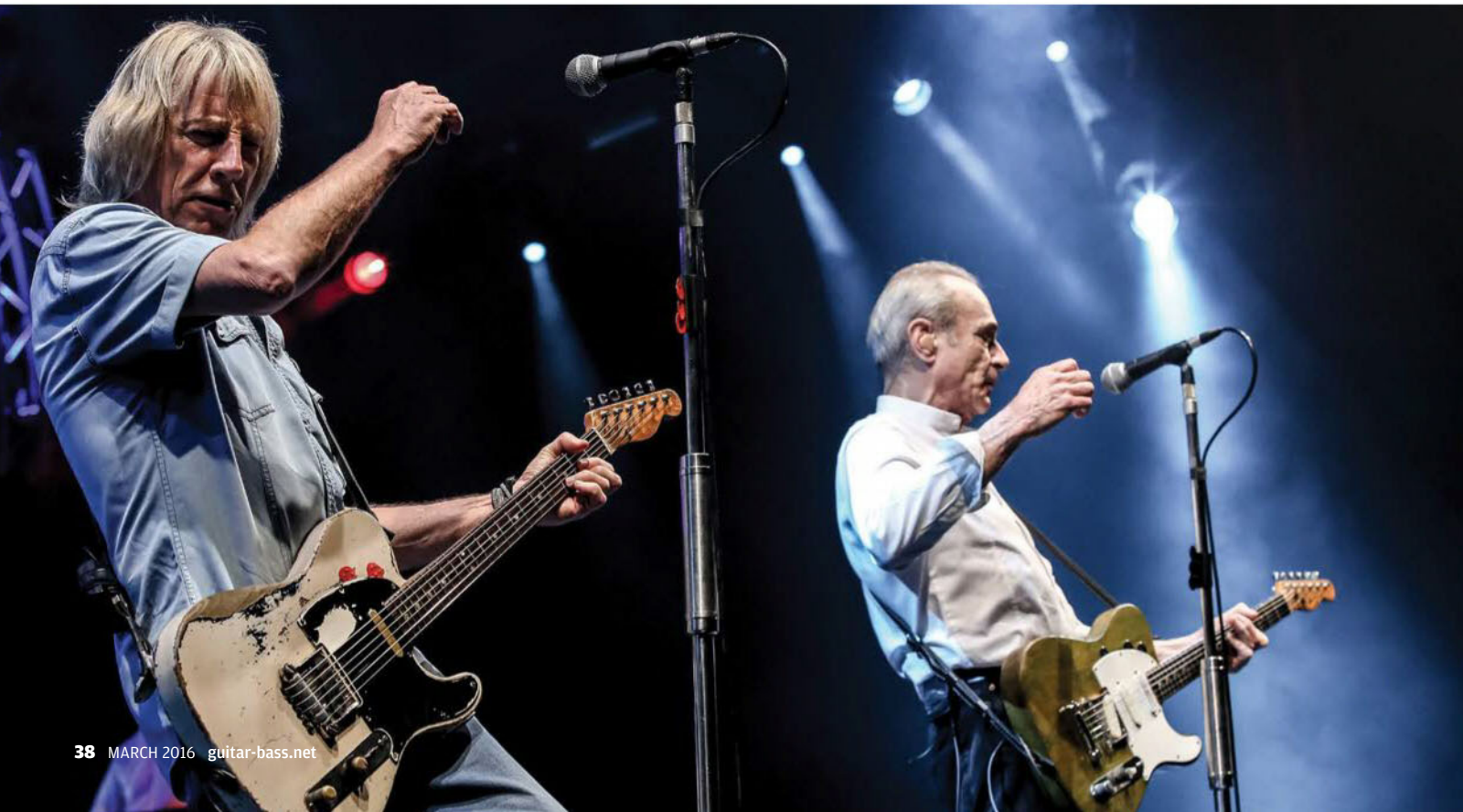
"John (Rhino) Edwards has always been happy with his Status Graphite basses, made by Rob Green, and said why not ask him to make me a guitar? Then the old-school thing kicked in and I was being told by some folk, 'no, it should be wood instead of graphite'. I had one made in a Tele shape with a grey finish, but I couldn't take to it. Then he came to rehearsals with another finished in green. I started talking through my teeth, saying, 'I don't need another guitar, let alone a green one'. I plugged it in and went, 'oh', and I've been playing that ever since. He makes lovely guitars. I call them donkey's knob guitars, if you know what I mean, I can't talk highly enough about them. It feels a bit odd sometimes when I look down and it's not my original green Tele, which I've been playing since I was 19."

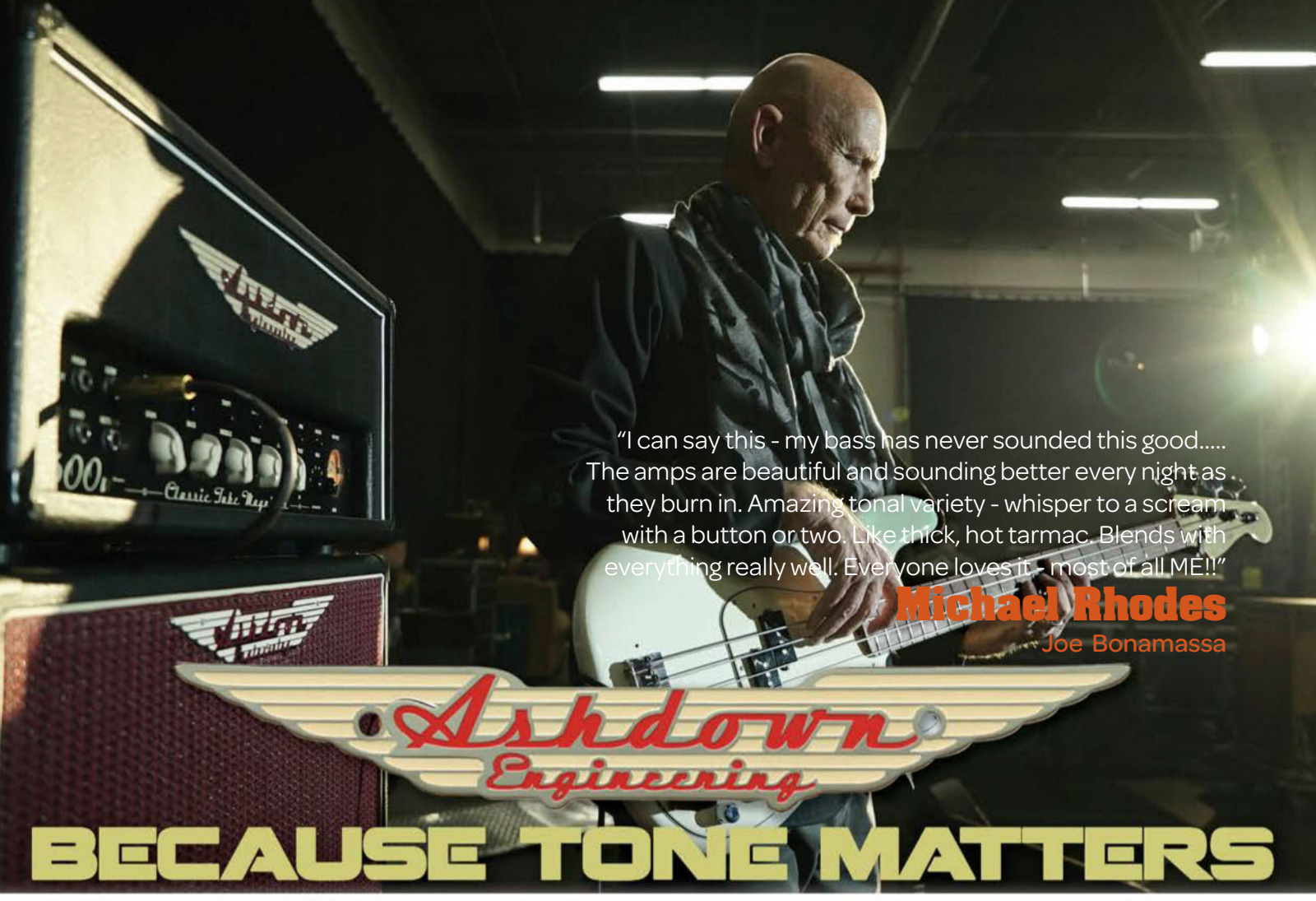
> "A lot of players think Quo stuff is easy until they try, and they realise they can't do it"
>
> RICK PARFITT

"There's a wonderful balance and solid feel about these guitars, especially the neck," says Parfitt, who plays a Status Graphite Slipstream. "Although they're a lot more modern, it's not that dissimilar in the feel and neck profile to my white '62 Tele, which is an amazing piece of kit. It's heavily strung, I let very few people near it, and those who have say, 'how the fuck do you play it?'.

"I've never claimed to be the most technical guitarist in the world – far from it. I do what I do, and nobody else seems to do it, most players strive to play complicated lead breaks. I started out to be just a rhythm player. Malcolm Young of AC/DC is the only rhythm player that comes to mind who plays the same way – no frills, just get your head down and do it.

"A lot of players think Quo stuff is easy, until they try, and they realise they fucking can't do it. You have to be committed and go for it 100 per cent or don't go for it at all."





"I can say this - my bass has never sounded this good..... The amps are beautiful and sounding better every night as they burn in. Amazing tonal variety - whisper to a scream with a button or two. Like thick, hot tarmac. Blends with everything really well. Everyone loves it - most of all ME!!"

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CHRIS REA

How I got started...

Rea-view Mirror

In the latest instalment of our regular series, it's the turn of veteran songwriter and slide ace Chris Rea to look back on what made him pick up the guitar in the first place

Story **David Gallant**

A portrait of the legendary bluesman Charley Patton takes pride of place on the wall above us as I sit down for a chat with Chrs Rea. "God knows how he managed to play a guitar with hands like that," says the Middlesbrough-born singer-songwriter and guitarist, who has sold well over 30 million albums worldwide. "They're proper hands!"

Patton was the first bluesman that Rea heard. "My mother had an alarm clock that was supposed to be a teasmaid and a radio console, but this thing never worked. Then it came on at about three o'clock in the afternoon, and it was just when they'd started the Telstar satellite. They were broadcasting an 'hour live' from America and it was something like RKO Memphis, and I started hearing this very strange sound.

"It was all crackles. At first, it sounded like 'this guy's playing a violin, but he's playing the most awesome tunes'. I was desperate to know what instrument it was. So I asked a friend over from a local band and he narrowed it down to something called a bottleneck. I hadn't a clue what a bottleneck was, but I was sucked in immediately. I got my dad's guitar and one of my sister's nail varnish bottles – and that's how I started!"

Rea grew up in a big family. "There was music around all the time," he recalls. "I had three older sisters. The eldest was into the Everly Brothers and Elvis Presley, while the two younger ones were into The Beatles and the Stones. I heard everything. The first disc I bought was The Shadows, *Frightened City*. My imagination went beserk – what is a frightened city and this very sinister kind of tune on the electric guitar?

"I was what you might call a late starter, I didn't start playing 'til I was 21. Those players around me had already been and gone. I found catching up pretty hard – I never really did catch up... four-finger scales drove me manic! I just went sideways into slide guitar, which of course is what I love."

Rea's first electric was a Hofner Verithin 3. "It cost 32 guineas in a second-hand shop. I don't know why, but we all adored Hofners... perhaps because there wasn't anything else!" Rea played the V3 up until 1979, when he got his first Strat. "We went to the City Hall in Newcastle to see Ry Cooder and the whole world changed – and that's why I got a Strat. I bought it in Doncaster. It's a '62 and it was going cheap. A lot of people didn't like this Strat because there's something about the sound – it's not got that classic hard Strat thing, it's very sweet. It got submerged in water for three months and it's just swelled up. You're only talking a millimetre or so, but it does make it a different guitar to your classic Strat."

> "I didn't start playing 'til I was 21. I found catching up hard – I just went sideways into slide guitar"

There was no such thing as a Stratocaster in a music shop in Middlesborough. The Verithin's a dreadful guitar with an appalling action, but playing slide it didn't matter – I wasn't playing blues licks or scales.

Rea continues: "Recently, though, I was looking for something that sounded like the sort of thing somebody might play on a street in a Chicago marketplace. So I went down to Denmark Street and saw this blue thing. It looked disgusting, but I thought, 'I can imagine that in a second-hand shop in Chicago'. It's a blue Italia Maranello, really light with two 'buckers. The only trouble is, because it's semi-hollow inside, we sometimes have trouble with the microphonics on big gigs.

"My latest acquisition is very similar to the 'bluey' in that it sounds old and cheap. It's set up to open B tuning, which is a new tuning for me." Rea has half a dozen guitars fitted with capos, all in different open tunings. "I've found out over the last five to six years that when I'm in the car or the shower, which is where you always get your best ideas, I always sing in B, which is a bloody awful key! B is dreadful for saxophones. Stevie Ray Vaughan used to tune to open A, but it was actually A♭, so he could work with horns." >

Rea's first amp was a 25-watt Laney. "It cost me nine guineas from the same shop where I bought the Verithin," he says. "I wish I still had it. It had a lovely tremolo – none of these digital things, they don't do it for me at all. You can hear the difference, you really can.

"We're in the middle of doing this *Passione* project, and when we decided to listen to the original *Passione* CD, it was like someone had sprinkled fairy dust over the desk. You just can't beat that analogue thing." After the Laney, Rea moved on to a Fender Twin. "I had that for a long time and now I've got these things..." he says pointing to a pair of amps. "This is my concert setup, a pair of Fender Blues Juniors. I set them up with two delays, a Tube Screamer and a Boss chorus. People are surprised how small the setup is. I use the Boss chorus as a preamp, and when it slightly overloads you get this lovely sustain." And the Tube Screamer? "I bought four of them, just in case anything happens." Returning to the amps, Rea says: "There's a big debate about which one's best. One's got a Celestion speaker, the other's got a vintage Fender. I prefer the one with the Celestion for recording, as it's got a little more give. I don't like hard sounds."

> "My happiest dream would have been to be a film music guy – I'd swap everything for that"

Rea readily admits that he would have been happier being known as a guitar player in a band that had another singer, but as he says: "The voice got in the way. The whole thing with the voice happened with my first band,

the Beautiful Losers. We had a singer and I just used to write the material and play slide guitar – Lowell George was god.

A label scout was coming up to see the band and I was the only one who knew the words, 'cos I'd written them. So I said, 'sorry, the singer's had a bit of a do'. I went to the microphone and they just presumed I was the singer and that was it."

Songwriting has always been at the heart of Rea's musical journey. "From the beginning, I'd stay at home writing, rather than join in a beat group. And, even now, I imagine who would sing 'this song'. I wrote *Fool (If You Think It's Over)* for Al Green. I've still got the original piece of paper – '96 beats per minute, song for Al Green, Al Jackson drums'." As it turned out, the song was a big hit for Rea himself. "I never thought I'd end up singing a song like that – ever," he admits.

"The next thing I'm looking for is a good classical – I love the sound of nylon-string guitars... and I'd love to be making films, just to do the music. I wrote a little bit for Pete Capaldi for *Soft Top Hard Shoulder*. My happiest dream would have been to be a film music guy – I'd swap everything for that."

Chris Rea's album and short film project *La Passione* is out now.

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ACE IN THE RAK

With two decades in the game and six studio albums under their belts, Skunk Anansie have survived in a changing industry. *G&B* heads to RAK Studios and talks to guitarist Ace...

Story **Chris Vinnicombe** | Photography **Kieran Morgan**

HOUSED IN A CONVERTED Victorian schoolhouse in St John's Wood, RAK Studios was opened by Mickie Most in 1976 and has since played host to the likes of Pink Floyd, David Bowie and Michael Jackson. It's exactly the kind of hallowed environment in which bands signed in the hedonistic whirl of the mid-1990s often found themselves. Yet though Skunk Anansie rose to prominence in that era, the story of the band's sixth studio long player, *Anarchytecture* – released nearly 22 years after the Brit rockers took to the stage for the first time at the long since defunct Splash Club in King's Cross – is one of thrift rather than excess.

"We financed it, and we did it right," reveals Ace. "When we did all the festival runs a couple of years ago, we saved a bunch of money and we financed this record. It's the new model. We've got our own label and we license it to other companies. So we can do what we want on the front end. We haven't got to go to a record company and ask them to pay for our record and they go, 'here's 10 grand', and then we end up doing it in our bedroom."

When the time came to break open the piggy bank, as well as choosing RAK for the sessions the band opted to work with producer du jour Tom Dalgety, whose work on Royal Blood's award-winning debut album prompted Ace and co to pick up the phone. And with Grammy-winning mastering engineer Ted Jensen taking care of the sonic fairy dust at Sterling Sound in New York, they definitely got their money's worth.

London's RAK Studios

"We might not make a lot of money on the record," the guitarist admits, "but because we're quite a big band and we're big in Europe and certain places around the world, we'll be able to recoup it. And from a musician's point of view, it's wicked to be in a good studio. It's that classic thrill of still being a professional musician, which is fading out for a lot of people. Even bigger bands can't afford

Four different PRS models feature on the new album

Ace's studio amps include an original JCM900 and a reissue 800 that's "the best-sounding Marshall I've got"

to do this now, because they rely on record companies to pay for it and record companies don't want to put so much money in because they can't get it back. We know we can get it back through licensing and world sales. Albums don't really make bands money now, but if you do a really wicked album then you get the good slots at festivals."

And it's not just the financial models for albums that have changed: "You'll see bands going on tour now, logistically they're travelling with nothing, you'll see them on easyJet at the airport, checking in one guitar. Everything's hired, they fly in, they do the show, they come out. There's none of this big trucking anymore. The big bands, like Metallica, are still trucking all their stuff and we still truck a certain amount through Europe, but I'm sure for this next wave of shows in 2016, we'll probably get 10 where we literally just fly in with a guitar and a pedalboard, when we're doing Russia and all those places.

"Back in the old days we'd have shipped something or trucked over to Russia with all of our gear. The old logistics have gone out of the window, as well as the other old-school things. Flying out to Spain or New York to do two days of promo has gone when you can use an ISDN line to do idents and interviews. Now you get an email from New York and have to write up the interview! And even this studio, like all the old studios, isn't making money now. They survive on other things, like events and things like that. It's nice that it's still here and I feel privileged to be in here, but if you were starting from scratch, you wouldn't build a place like this. If you were starting an office you wouldn't have a printing press instead of a photocopier, you wouldn't have big computers, you'd just have a laptop."

> "It's the classic thrill of still being a professional musician, which is fading out for a lot of people"

Though the band have adapted while the tectonic plates of the music business continue to shift and reshape the landscape around them, the way in which Skunk Anansie function as a musical unit remains unshakable and forms the organic core of the new album.

"When we write songs we play them together, and when we play them together we know they're gonna work live. If we write on a four-track or laptop or something, we don't really know if it's going to work together live. Everyone always used to say to us, 'you're a really great live band, you have to capture that on a record'. Or even that we sound better than the records! We don't, but it's a different experience because we're in your face and it's really, really loud. But when we record we capture the live vibe on it, that's why all of the original tracking is done together in a room and then we'll build on that."

And build on it they did; but it wasn't a case of stacking up overdub after overdub: "This album's been really simplistic," says Ace. "Where I was thinking, 'oh god, I've got to come up with a really difficult part for this', the producer said to me, 'just stick a bunch of pedals on and play one note'. So I'm not frightened about playing this record live! Skin was like, 'I don't want any double-tracking, I don't want a wall of sound', so we split the amps in two and it's one big guitar sound through two amps. And that's the philosophy of this, it's just one guitar and it sounds massive. I have tracked stuff and I've done overdubs, but as minimal as possible so that when we go out live, it'll sound like that. And when I'm out live I do use two amps, it's a similar kind of set-up."

Ace's modified PRS Tremonti features a custom truss rod cover by Japanese jewellery designer Jay Tsujimura

"Just stick a bunch of pedals on and play one note," OK then!

Ace turns to his Mira Soapbar for its "great sort of AC/DC tone"

And if the band ever do need to replicate more complex guitar arrangements on stage, pragmatism wins out: "Sometimes Skin plays rhythm and other times I'll use octaves and delays – I've always used octaves and delays to make up for [being the only guitarist]. And you choose your parts, don't you? I don't mind overdubbing stuff on a record because when it's live some people don't miss it, or the bass distortion becomes your rhythm guitar and you can play the melodies, so I just choose the ones that suit me when it's live. People pick up on the melodies, that's the thing that you can't leave out."

Shortly before we leave Ace to put the finishing touches to the album, we wonder if the sessions have been smooth sailing and hugely enjoyable for the band from a musical perspective precisely because of the weight of experience that has also helped them to take control of their financial destiny.

"It's been really good," enthuses Ace. "It hasn't been meticulous, it's been very quick. I'm not sure if that's because it's simplistic or if we're just a bit older and better. I think some of the guitar parts that would have taken me an hour to do, now I can do in a couple of minutes. Cass just sits down and does the bass in one take, Mark's done in two or three goes through. When we were recording [1999's] *Post Orgasmic Chill*, I remember it used to be six or seven drum takes to get the song, then it would be a day of playing all of the guitars and double-tracking, and it was all to tape, so you couldn't make any mistakes... When you're in that kind of zone and you've done it for years, when you do it on a computer you're still in that mindset and you just do it. You don't play little bits and chop it up. You start the track, play it all the way through and that's it."

"In the zone" is an apt description of a man who clearly has lost not one iota of the exuberance he has for his chosen vocation, and it's this that helps make Ace so effective in the field of music education, in which he's been active for many years.

"The main thing about music is, for me, time stands still," he says. "When I play guitar, I always feel like I'm 12 years old, because I started playing at 12 and when I play I get that feeling, no matter where I am. Even when I'm onstage with the band I always feel like a kid. That's stuck in my psyche. And when we got signed, we were like 24, 25, and we got stuck in that zone. So when we're apart, we might be responsible adults, but when we're together it's like we're 24 again. Our conversations may have grown up a little bit, but most of the time we're like kids. When we are together in the studio it's just as creative, there's nothing stale about it and we really enjoy it. And we now control everything.

"But we've all got other things in our lives. Bands used to be 48 weeks a year, now we'll probably do two or three weeks in Europe, two and a half months of festivals, and that will be it. For the rest of the year, we're off doing what we want.

"I've got seven guitar academies now, five in Italy and two in England, and I'm now the head of creative industry development at ACM. I run a department called Industry Link and I'm on the senior management team for the college, and we've set it up so that whenever a student needs it, they can borrow a PRS guitar. I've covered all of the walls of my office with gold discs!"

Anarchytecture, the new album by Skunk Anansie, is out now. To find out more about the courses on offer at the Ace Guitar Academy and ACM, visit the website at www.aceguitaracademy.co.uk & www.acm.ac.uk

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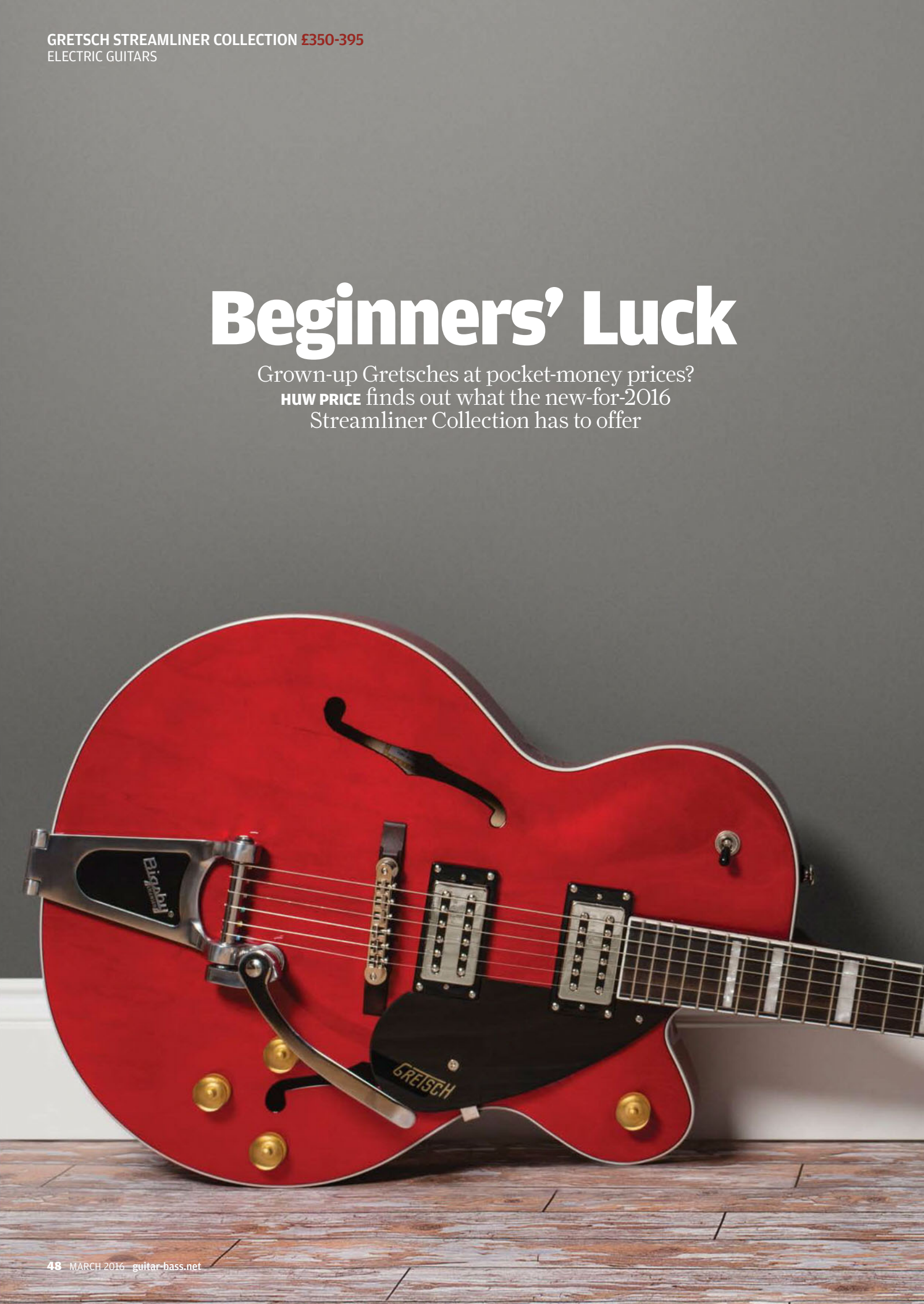
Grown-up Gretsches at pocket-money prices? **HUW PRICE** finds out what the new-for-2016 Streamliner Collection has to offer



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LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

G2655T Streamliner Center-Block Junior Double Cutaway

Slightly bigger than a Les Paul, the Bigsby-fied **Epiphone Wildcat £379** has a solid mahogany centre-block. Also check out the **Hagstrom Viking TC £432** and the **Ibanez AS73T-TCR £381**.

The Streamliner moniker arrived in the Gretsch catalogue in 1955 with a range of affordable instruments descended from the earlier Electromatics. Both names have, of course, since reappeared in the Gretsch product line, and now 2016 sees the new Streamliner Collection arrive in the form of a trio of guitars that are very competitively priced indeed.

As you'd expect from instruments that originate from the same series, several features are common throughout. The control layouts are identical, and by Gretsch standards things are relatively simple. There's a three-way selector switch with a master volume control on the lower horn – Gretsch's original solution for easy access to the volume control with Bigsby-equipped guitars always was the best. Each pickup has its own volume control, and the tone control is shared. The colours may differ, but all have clear plastic knobs that are not unlike Gibson's early tall speed knobs.

The bodies, fingerboards and headstocks have white plastic binding, and headstocks are scarf jointed to the necks. The nickel-plated hardware includes Gretsch's Adjusto-Matic bridge and unbranded die-cast tuners. Teardrop-shaped pickguards are fitted on all the guitars in the range, in addition to as 'synthetic bone' nuts and 1950s-style pearloid block inlays and rosewood fingerboards.

The fretwork is excellent on all three guitars but, despite the published specifications, I would describe the fretwire as fairly low and narrow, rather than 'medium jumbo'. So, let's get into some of the model specifics...

G2655T Streamliner Center-Block Junior Double Cutaway

I thought I'd start off with the smallest guitar and work my way through the range, so first up is the Streamliner Center-Block Double Cutaway, which I'll refer to as the Junior. It's a scaled-down version of Gretsch's earliest double-cutaway design, but the lightweight spruce centre-block provides an interesting twist: the intention is to solidify the structure and make the Junior less susceptible to feedback at high gain and volume than traditionally-constructed Gretsch guitars.

With its licensed B50 Bigsby, clean look and stripped-back controls, the Junior has the visual vibe of a contemporary boutique semi-solid. That's hardly surprising when you consider how many styling cues manufacturers of such guitars have borrowed from Gretsch over the years.

With its licensed B50 Bigsby, clean look and stripped-back controls, the Junior has the vibe of a boutique semi-solid

Gretsch used this shape on the 6122Jr Junior Gent model, and some will note its similarity to Jack White's modified Anniversary Junior. It's a cool concept, because you get the feel and sound of a semi-solid without the bulk.

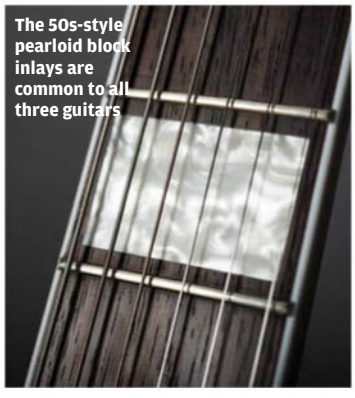
In use

All three Streamliners have fairly generic U-profile necks of medium depth. The body's shape and size make the Junior comfortable to hold, but choose your strap carefully: there's a little neck dive due to the weight of the tuners.

There's enough acoustic tone on offer to make playing unplugged an enjoyable experience, and the even string-to-string balance and impressive sustain come courtesy of that centre-block. Some of the Adjusto-Matic bridge saddles are a little bit buzzy, but the Junior's easy-playing action and rock-solid tuning are impressive: the Bigsby has enough travel to wobble chords about nicely, and you can get fairly vigorous with the arm before things begin to drift.

Soon after plugging in, you'll realise that it's 'Tron' by name but not by nature, because the Broad'Trons sound very different to traditional Filter'Trons; despite appearances, these units sound much closer to standard humbuckers. The bridge pickup is by far the most powerful and has a throaty midrange bark rather than a retro twang. The neck position sounds clearer and rounder, and allows more of the Junior's semi-solid woodiness to come through.

The low-set humbuckers on the Single Cutaway are great for jazz


The 50s-style pearloid block inlays are common to all three guitars

The Junior's licensed B50 has ample travel

Both pickups have a fairly high output and, with the factory setup, the bridge can push vintage-style valve amps into a rough and slightly splatty overdrive. Lowering the pickups to put more distance between the coils and the strings helps the Junior sing a lot more sweetly and sound more characteristically Gretsch-like.

Through an overdrive pedal, the Junior produces big great-sounding powerchords, crunchy riffs and bluesy solo tones. Played clean, it has a quite delicate roundness on the neck setting and a lovely, phasey scoop with both pickups engaged. I couldn't quite dial out the bridge pickup's raspy bark, so this is maybe one for those with rockier inclinations.

As it's a semi, overdrive at medium volumes brings controllable feedback, and happily it's squeal-free. The tone control can be used to dial in a 'woman' tone on the neck pickup with no loss of clarity, but it's less useful on the bridge pickup, where it can make things sound muddy and indistinct.

G2622 Streamliner Center-Block Double Cutaway

Although this guitar may appear to sit squarely in ES-335 territory, there are important structural differences. Gretsch uses spruce rather than maple for its centre-block, which adds far less weight. The block is also chambered, so it does its job of adding rigidity, but Gretsch is able to keep those wide-open spaces inside the body. It's the sort of thing Chet Atkins was begging Gretsch for in the 1950s, so he probably would have approved.

Most of the Double Cutaway's ingredients are identical to the Junior's, with the exception of the gold knobs and the tailpiece. Although it performs exactly the same function as a regular stop tailpiece, the Gretsch designers have cleverly incorporated the iconic V motif seen on the Cadillac tailpieces of the White Falcon and Penguin models.

In use

It's impossible to say with absolute certainty whether it's the larger body cavities or the absence of a Bigsby, but the Double Cutaway's acoustic tone is more pleasing than the Junior's. The body resonates more, it's louder and there's more bass content.

The very qualities that promise so much when the Double Cutaway is played unplugged may be thought by some to work to its disadvantage when played through an amp. When you combine a more full-bodied resonance with pickups that are relatively dark compared to vintage Filter'Trons and DeArmond Dynasonics, it can result in a slightly muffled tone.

In practice, this means the Double Cutaway sounds more like a Gibson-style semi than it does a traditional Gretsch. Depending on your point of view, this isn't necessarily a bad thing – and who can blame Gretsch for wanting to break the bonds of the rockabilly straightjacket? Again, lowering the neck humbucker helps it sound sweet and clear, but I'm inclined to think that the bridge pickup's 9.3k-ohm DC resistance is a tad overcooked. 9.3k (bridge) and 7.8k (neck) readings were consistent across all three guitars.

Numbers aside, the pickups combine to really good effect in the middle position, and this is where all three Streamliners sound their most Gretsch-like in the traditional sense. Used together, the midrange is scooped out, which helps to emphasise the bass and treble frequencies; so if you want to play fingerstyle, or hybrid picking is your thing, this is the setting to use.

Although it seems counterintuitive, I prefer the Junior for clean and the Double Cutaway for dirt. Through a cranked amp or overdrive pedal, the Double Cutaway sounds huge and combines familiar semi-solid characteristics with an extra serving of harmonic chime and woody depth.

Despite the bigger body outline, the Double Cutaway seems more resistant to feedback than the Junior. Overtones bloom pleasingly on top of fundamental frequencies, as feedback eases over held chords and single notes. However, I found the Double Cutaway's sustain characteristics a little unpredictable: some notes hang on indefinitely, while others fade fast.

G2420T Streamliner Single Cutaway Hollow Body With Bigsby

The big boy of the range is fully hollow. Given that the other Streamliners have centre-blocks, some trestle bracing >

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

G2622 Streamliner Center-Block Double Cutaway

One solid centre-block option with two humbuckers could be the **Epiphone ES-339 £359**. If you want a Bigsby-style trem, check out the **Ibanez AS73T Artcore £385**. The **Eastwood Classic 6 WH £350** looks striking with its white finish and gold hardware.

G2655T Streamliner Single Cutaway Hollow Body With Bigsby

The **Ibanez AF75TDG £439** is a big hollow singlecut with a Bigsby-style trem, and the **Ibanez AGR63T £419** has narrow pickups and is available in orange. A trem-less option could be the **Stagg Jazz Arch Top Semi £345**.

Behind The Liners

Gretsch product manager Adam Bowden-Smith gives us the skinny...

Q How did these models come about?
"This is a price point we haven't existed in previously. Now we have the right R&D team and the right factories to do it properly, rather than simply taking guitar bodies and parts off the peg from a Far Eastern factory and putting our brand on it. The tailpieces and pickups were designed exclusively for these guitars. So they have a lot of Gretsch DNA, combined with features that are all-new."

Q Can you tell us more about the pickups?
"They resemble some we used to use on the old 5120, but they are completely brand new. The Gretsch R&D team spent quite a long time going through prototypes made in-house in Scottsdale. The sound we were looking for was between a classic Filter'Tron and a PAF-style humbucker, but leaning more towards the Filter'Tron. So Gretsch tonality with a broader sound, hence the Broad'Tron name. Once we were happy, we handed those specs over to a manufacturer in the Far East for mass production."

Q Is the pickup voicing indicative of Gretsch's intention to move beyond its traditional fan base?
"Not necessarily. We think Gretsch guitars are more versatile than perhaps they are perceived to be, and our sound fits perfectly between the other classic sounds that are out there. But at the same time, the size of the pickup determines the tone because the magnetic field is wider and less focused than a Filter'Tron's. We want to appeal to a broader range of people, who haven't previously heard our sound. Voicing the pickups the way we have gives them a taste of that sound without taking them too far away from familiar territory. We're inviting them into the Gretsch world through a familiar window."

Q Has Gretsch's link with rockabilly been a mixed blessing?
"That's a good way to put it. Brian Setzer has been a huge part of Gretsch's resurgence and success, but there is this pigeon-holing that has led some people to think Gretsches are just rockabilly guitars. Look back at the early days of rockabilly – very few of those players actually used Gretsches. Setzer bought his first Gretsch because of Eddie Cochran, but he ended up with the wrong pickups and history got rewritten!"

Q The f-holes on these new models are really small...
"They are, but like almost every feature on these guitars, they have some place in Gretsch history. We call those Baldwin-era f-holes, and they were a lot smaller than the oversized holes on older Gretsches. To get the bigger f-holes, orange and white finish options or the Filter'Trons of a full-fat Gretsch you will need to go to the next level up."

Q Or the Streamliners could be modified instead?
"We think it could become a big sub-culture, because they would make great modding platforms. There'll be loads of these guitars with new pickups, new tuners, new this and that, simply because they're so great. I just hope people will listen to these pickups first before changing them."

The Streamliners' headstocks are plain and tidy looking

The Junior's upper-fret access is superior to its siblings

These Gretsches are so solidly made and well finished that there's plenty to enjoy for newbies and Gretsch die-hards alike

or sound posts might have made things more series-consistent but, even so, I'm not complaining.

The bridges of vintage Gretsch archtops were supposedly held in position by downward pressure from the strings. Those who have spent entire gigs chasing these bridges around the tops of their guitars will be pleased to learn that this 'secured' design does not move. As well as conforming tightly to the curve of the top, the bridge posts protrude beneath the rosewood base and slot into locating holes. It's not exactly a pinned bridge, but the outcome is the same. Besides that, the fixtures and fittings here are exactly the same as on the other models.

In use

Given that the Single Cutaway is the most 'traditionally' constructed Gretsch in this line-up, it's perhaps surprising that it's also the body that brings out the best from the Broad'Tron pickups. While it can't be said that the neck pickup setting sounds exactly like an old 6120, the big hollow body, combined with a floating bridge and a low-set humbucker, is a tried-and-trusted recipe for jazz tone.

It sounds mellow, woody and very balanced across the strings, and the slight shoutiness of the pickup can be tamed by rolling the volume control back just a smidgeon. Through a Fender Deluxe Reverb, I found it a very involving and enjoyable tone, and the extra range of the tension bar-less Bigsby allows you to do all those cool shimmers, slurs and dips.

Again, the middle setting's phasiness gets you closest to classic Gretsch tone, and dipping the neck volume to reduce the bass content gets you closer still. The bridge pickup doesn't sound as aggressive on this guitar, and much of that can be attributed to the distance it's set away from the strings. The guitar's neck and bridge sit high above the body, so there's a lot of air between

the strings and the pickups. This, combined with the inherently mellow tone of a bona fide hollowbody, ensures that the Single Cutaway sounds more old-school than its siblings.

It feeds back without much provocation, which is hardly surprising for a guitar of this type. As expected, there's not enough sustain for rock soloing, but the Single Cutaway delivers huge tones for rhythm work when overdriven.

As you'd expect in this sub-£400 price bracket, there are significant differences between the Streamliner instruments and their considerably more expensive equivalents in the Professional Collection. The current line of Electromatics is also sonically and aesthetically closer to the iconic Gretsch stylings of old. Having said that, what's really exciting about the Streamliners is their upgrade potential.

Modifying and customisation has long been an aspect of Gretsch culture, and it wouldn't take much to give these instruments the hotrod treatment. Sourcing and installing a set of metal 'G-arrow' knobs would be a simple and affordable upgrade. The same could be said for a vintage-style metal switch tip, and many will welcome the Streamliners' plainer-looking headstocks.

Other upgrade possibilities might include the pickguard, bridge and tuners. You could even apply a waterslide decal with a pin-up person of your choice and you would have a killer-looking Gretsch that plays like a dream. But, most excitingly of all, the conventional humbucker dimensions of the Broad'Tron pickups open up a great plethora of possibilities for customisation.

None of the above should be taken as criticisms of the Streamliner Collection models in their standard forms. I wouldn't even be pondering these modifications if I didn't believe these guitars were more than good enough to justify the additional effort and expense.

There will always be compromises at the entry-level point, and I think the Gretsch guys have been very canny about exatly where those compromises have been made. Rather than skimping on the materials or the appearance, these Gretsches are so solidly made and well finished that there's plenty to enjoy for newbies and Gretsch die-hards alike.

KEY FEATURES

G2655T Streamliner Center-Block Junior Double Cutaway

- **PRICE** £395
- **DESCRIPTION** Semi-solid electric guitar, manufactured in Indonesia
- **BUILD** Laminated maple body with chambered spruce centre-block, nato set neck with medium U profile, 12" radius rosewood fingerboard with pearloid block inlays and 22 frets
- **HARDWARE** Licensed B50 Bigsby, Adjusto-Matic bridge, die-cast tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Broad'Tron humbucking alnico 5 pickups, master volume, master tone, invidual volume controls, three-way selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 628mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 21mm at first fret, 23mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34.5mm at nut, 51.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 2.85Kg/6.28lbs
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISHES** Walnut Stain, Black and Flagstaff Sunset (without Bigsby)

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Stylish design
+ Easy-to-manage size
+ Easy playability and stable tuning
+ Surprisingly sweet clean tones

– Overly aggressive bridge pickup
– Slightly neck-heavy

The Streamliner with the most crossover appeal and the easiest body size to handle could be a killer with a few mods

9/10

KEY FEATURES

G2622 Streamliner Center-Block Double Cutaway

- **PRICE** £350
- **DESCRIPTION** Semi-solid electric guitar, manufactured in Indonesia
- **BUILD** Laminated maple body with chambered spruce centre-block, nato set neck with medium U profile, 12" radius rosewood fingerboard with pearloid block inlays and 22 frets
- **HARDWARE** 'V' stoptail, Adjusto-Matic bridge, die-cast tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Broad'Tron humbucking alnico 5 pickups, master volume, master tone, invidual volume controls, three-way selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 628mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 21mm at first fret, 23mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34.5mm at nut, 51.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 2.9Kg/6.39lbs
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes (Flagstaff Sunset only)
- **FINISHES** Flagstaff Sunset, Torino Green and Walnut Stain (with Bigsby)

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Excellent natural resonance and overdrive tones
+ Traditional doublecut looks
+ Cool V-shape tailpiece
+ Easy playability and stable tuning

– Overcooked bridge pickup
– Uneven sustain across fingerboard

Gretsch style and looks combined with regular semi-solid tones that respond well to overdrive

8/10

KEY FEATURES

G2420T Streamliner Single Cutaway Hollow Body With Bigsby

- **PRICE** £395
- **DESCRIPTION** Hollow electric guitar, manufactured in Indonesia
- **BUILD** Laminated maple body with chambered spruce centre block, nato set neck with medium U profile, 12" radius rosewood fingerboard with pearloid block inlays and 22 frets
- **HARDWARE** Licensed B50 Bigsby, Adjusto-Matic bridge, die-cast tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Broad'Tron humbucking alnico 5 pickups, master volume, master tone, invidual volume controls, three-way selector switch
- **SCALE LENGTH** 628mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 21mm at first fret, 24mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 34.5mm at nut, 51.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.33Kg/7.34lbs
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISHES** Flagstaff Sunset, Gold Dust and Aged Brooklyn Burst (without Bigsby)

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Classic Gretsch shape
+ Full-on Bigsby experience
+ Easy playability and stable tuning
+ Sweet and woody tone

– High-volume drive options limited
– A bit of an armful

Comes closest to the classic Gretsch big hollowbody tradition for jazz, rockabilly and rock 'n' roll clean tones, as well as huge powerchords

8/10

Novo Guitars Serus T

Guitar AWARD EXCELLENCE 10/10

Dennis Fano left the company that bears his name to found Novo Guitars. **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** plays the first example to land in the UK

Dennis Fano is a name that you will doubtless recognise from its assocation with Fano Guitars, the company he founded in Pennsylvania that went on to become part of the Premier Builders Guild, alongside the Tone King, Two-Rock, b3 and Koll brands. Although Fano Guitars continues to produce Dennis Fano-designed instruments in California, the man himself recently parted company with the organisation and launched a new company – Novo Guitars.

"It wasn't an easy decision to make," admits Dennis as we interrupt his busy pre-NAMM building schedule to quiz him about the birth of his latest venture, named after a Latin word that means to make anew or refresh. "Management was taking the company in a direction that I did not agree with and our goals and priorities were no longer aligned, so it was time for me to move on."

Novo Guitars are available exclusively in the UK via Coda Music and, true to form, Dennis's first batch of new models are fusions of vintage inspiration and modern, player-friendly pragmatism. This Serus T is, at the time of writing, the first example to land on these shores, and its collision of influences is something that Fano is "very excited" about: "I see bits of my past in it and the progress I've made along the way. I've been a sucker for offset bodies ever since I got my '66 Jazz Bass back in '85. The majority of my designs over the years have had one foot in the middle of the last century and the other rooted firmly in the present."

With a pronounced grain visible through the moderately distressed, thin blonde nitrocellulose finish, the Serus T's slab body might fool you into thinking it's lightweight ash, but in fact it's hewn from tempered red pine. "Tempering is a highly scientific drying process that the wood undergoes to make it lighter, stiffer and more stable than the industry-standard kiln-dried wood," says Fano. "Tempered wood is more resonant and has a longer natural sustain than kiln-dried woods. The finished weight of the instrument is something that has to be considered before you start building – keeping a close eye on the weight of the raw lumber is crucial."

The neck is another section of tempered wood; this time, it's maple, with a chunky C-shape profile that feels like a slightly fuller version of Fender's transition-era neck. It's fairly slim behind the first fret, but quickly fills out to a rounder C by the time you reach the fifth. "I think this is the perfect neck for the player who likes a little more meat than an early-60s Strat neck, but not quite as much meat as a 50s Tele or LP neck," says Fano. >

"The majority of my designs have had one foot in the middle of the last century and the other rooted in the present"

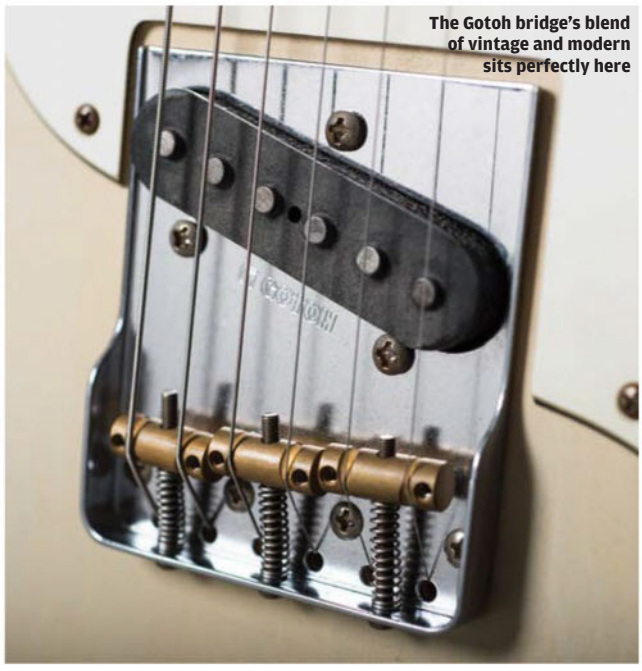
DENNIS FANO

The neck Amalfitano: "It retains some of the sonic characteristics of a P-90 but it's more articulate."

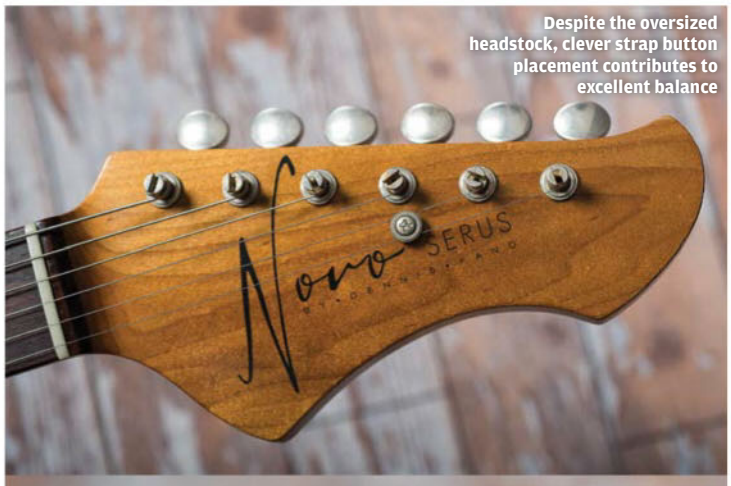
KEY FEATURES

Novo Guitars Serus T

- **PRICE** £2,099
- **DESCRIPTION** Offset solidbody double-cutaway electric, made in the USA
- **BUILD** Tempered red pine slab body, bolt-on tempered maple neck with compound 9.5-12" radius rosewood fretboard, 21 frets, Jescar 6125 fretwire, bone nut
- **HARDWARE** Gotoh T-style bridge with 3x compensated brass saddles and vintage-style machineheads
- **ELECTRICS** Amalfitano TP bridge and P-45 neck singlecoil pickups, four-way blade pickup selector switch, master volume, master tone
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/647.7mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 41mm at nut, 51mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21.8mm at first fret, 24.1mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35mm at nut, 53mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.4lb/3.3kg
- **FINISHES** Distressed Blonde (as reviewed). Numerous options available, including a large selection of tempered tonewoods, neck carves, fingerboard radiuses, pickups and finishes. See website for details
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815 **www.novoguitars.com**



The Gotoh bridge's blend of vintage and modern sits perfectly here



Despite the oversized headstock, clever strap button placement contributes to excellent balance

The Serus T's neck is simply wonderful – you'll find it near-impossible to put down

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
Until we played the Serus T, **The Fano RB6 Thinline £3,499** was our favourite of Dennis's designs, with its Tele-meets-Ricky looks and Gibson-style feel. **K-Line's Truxton £1,899** has a more singular inspiration, but offers high quality for the money in all areas. Check out the **Echopark J Model £3,499** for another cool Tele-meets-offset boutique mash-up.

There's an obvious Telecaster influence to the electronics, with a four-way switch granting access to an extra series, humbucking mode in position four, in addition to the usual bridge/both pickups in parallel/neck selections. Amalfitano is the pickup brand of choice here, and though the neck unit appears to be a P-90, that isn't the case: "The neck pickup is something Jerry calls a P-45," Fano explains. "It's constructed like a P-90, but it only has one bar magnet instead of two. It retains some the sonic characteristics of a P-90 but it's more articulate. The output is reduced, so it balances well the Tele-style bridge pickup."

In use

Dennis Fano is quite right to be excited about this guitar, and you should be too. The acoustic volume and resonance is remarkable and the overall feel is of an instrument that's highly expressive, with no aspect of its expert design getting in the way of the business at hand. As you might expect from a guitar with a pine body, it's very light – especially compared to an alder-bodied Jaguar or Jazzmaster with similar physical proportions – but despite the larger-than-average headstock, the combination of the shape of the upper horn and ingenious strap button placement means it balances in a really natural playing position on a strap with no neck dive whatsoever, whether you sling it high or low.

The neck is simply a work of fine art: its wonderful shape and the compound fingerboard radius combine to ensure that playability is easy all over the fretboard. Huge, high-register bends are as comfortable to execute as cowboy chords, and the hand so naturally curves around the profile that you'll have to force yourself to put down this guitar. The ageing isn't simply an aesthetic conceit, it is conducive to fretting-hand comfort: much of the gloss at the rear of the neck has been stripped back to a deliciously silky finish, and the rosewood board edges have been lightly rolled for an authentic 'old guitar' feel, albeit without any sense of struggle from a player's perspective. The relatively slim Jescar fretwire is excellent, too. Dennis has got all of the little things that matter right, and the Serus T is a joy to play as a result.

As sonically pretty as it is explosive, to say we'll be sad to see the Serus T go is an Olympic-level understatement

The Amalfitano pickups are airy and very old-sounding – there's a sophistication and edge-of-microphony complexity here that is very much in the Fender camp, with hints of Tele and Strat, but that has an individual voice of its own in that wonderfully smoky-yet-snappy series position. The bridge unit is delightfully raunchy, with loads of the right treble frequencies, so there's grit, grind and fireworks but it never becomes overly brittle.

As aesthetically and sonically pretty as it is explosive, to say that we'll be sad to see the Serus T go is an Olympic-level understatement; this is the closest we've come to flexing the credit card in the direction of a new guitar in a good few years. Dennis Fano knows how to make a guitar, alright.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Light, loud, balanced and resonant
+ Sonic sophistication that you can get lost in
+ The neck shape and feel is as good as a bolt-on gets
+ Pricing very reasonable given the level of quality

– The headstock shape might not be to everyone's taste

His earlier designs were impressive, but Dennis Fano has raised his game to virtuoso levels with the Novo Serus T

10/10

INTRODUCING THE CRY BABY MINI.

cry baby MINI | Dunlop

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HAGSTROM RETROSCAPE H-III £549
ELECTRIC GUITAR

Hagstrom Retroscape H-III

Hagstrom's H-III was a classic 60s instrument and this update captures its spirit perfectly. **MARCUS LEADLEY** takes a look

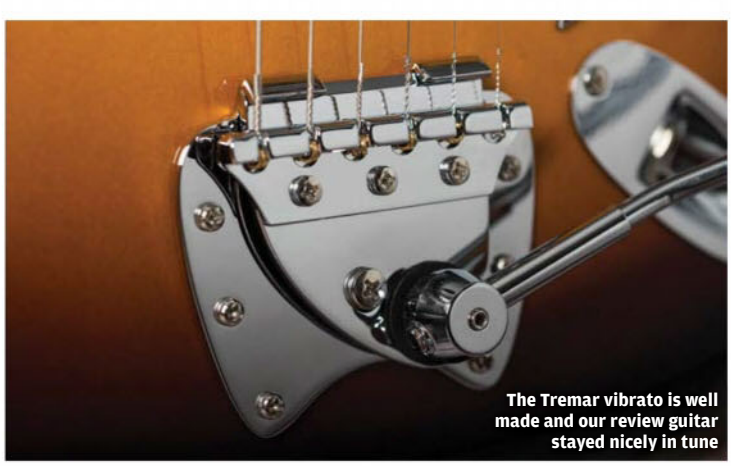
By the time the mid-1960s, arrived, Swedish guitar maker Hagstrom was already well seasoned in the art of instrument building. Guitars under its own name and international brands such as Kent and Futurama had spread around the world. The H-III (along with the H-II) was introduced in 1965 and, like many instruments of the period, sported multiple pickups and a fearsome array of switches – all designed to get the maximum flexibility of level and tone from the basic valve amps of the day.

Today's H-III is something of a hybrid, relying on North American timber and Chinese manufacturing prowess – and yet the character is unmistakably European. While the basic concept of a bolt-on neck, three single-coil pickups and a tremolo bridge pays homage to Fender's innovative approach for the Stratocaster, the H-III feels and sounds distinct – with some similarities to the Burns Marquee but its own character. However, both Hagstrom and Burns pickups feature ceramic magnets, so the comparison is not lost.

The original hardware was designed for purpose and function, while carefully avoiding any Fender patent infringements, and this contributes massively to the sense of individuality. For this 1966 update, Hagstrom has made a few contemporary adjustments: the Canadian maple neck is retained by a metal plate and four bolts, not three (as per the original), and the new roller bridge is a great improvement over the vintage version which, while being intonatable, relied on friction saddles. As a consequence, the Tremar vibrato works well and the instrument stays in tune – most of the time. However, the unit's not designed for aggressive bends. Spring-loaded from below and with a tension adjuster screw, it also functions as the tailpiece where the strings are retained. In terms of performance and feel, it has a very similar character and set of limitations to Fender's Jazzmaster tremolo. While we're down at this end of the guitar, note the two strap buttons; anyone who's watched a guitar slide and crash to the floor from a position lent against an amp will appreciate this very pragmatic bit of Swedish design. While the body, which is made from selected American alder, retains its overall form with sharp offset horns somewhat reminiscent of the Guild S-100, the headstock gets a redesign to make it a little less Fender-like. I like this new look; it's chubby in a vintage Teisco way.

The neck feels great. It's broader and flatter than you might expect, while under the fingers the board feels remarkably consistent and friction-free. This isn't luck, it's materials science; the fingerboard is made from a proprietary substance called Resinator, which Hagstrom now uses on all of its guitars. It has the appearance and feel more of ebony than rosewood. Generally speaking, the instrument's finishing is very good. However, there >

The neck feels great. It's broader and flatter than you might expect. The board feels consistent and friction-free



The Tremar vibrato is well made and our review guitar stayed nicely in tune

KEY FEATURES

Hagstrom Retroscape HIII

- **PRICE** £549
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody guitar, built in China
- **BUILD** American alder body with Canadian bolt-on maple neck with 15" radius, 22-fret Resinator fretboard
- **HARDWARE** Tremar tremolo tailpiece and long travel T-O-M bridge with roller saddles. GraphTech black Tusq XL nut and Hagstrom 15:1 die-cast tuners
- **ELECTRICS** 3x Hagstrom ceramic C-spin pickups. Pickup selection: neck pickup on/off, middle pickup on/off, bridge pickup on/off, master tone on/off, mute on/off, top (bass cut) on/off. 1x volume with R/C tone circuit, kill switch on upper horn
- **SCALE LENGTH** 24.75/628mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 43.2mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21.5mm at first fret, 22mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.2mm at nut, 52mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.9lbs/3.58kg
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISHES** Aged Sky Blue, 3-Tone Sunburst, Black, White
- **CONTACT** Rosetti 01376 550033 **www.rosetti.co.uk** **www.hagstrom-guitars.com**

If these six selector switches aren't enough, there's a kill switch on the upper bout, too

The Canadian maple neck is fixed to the body by four bolts rather than the original guitar's three

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
If you're after three single-coil pickups, a tremolo and 1960s tones, the **Burns Bison '62 £442** is definitely one to check out. Fancy a mass of switches? **Italia**'s **Imola 6 £564** offers a trem, six pickups (in three pairs) and a 25-way switching system. Bolt-on neck, three single coils and a tremolo bridge? Let's not overlook the grandaddy of them all – the **Fender Standard Strat £460**.

are a couple of minor issues. Over-zealous buffing of the neck appears to have caused some scratching of the upper frets on the treble side of the neck above the 12th fret. Also, the pickup surrounds have been fitted over the scratchplate's clear film protector, which makes it difficult to remove cleanly without leaving a ragged edge.

The new Retro-S single-coil pickups are designed as close reproductions of the 1960s originals, and with the blocky, rectangular design and chrome surrounds Hagstrom's certainly got the look right. While the single volume control needs little introduction, the six selector switches certainly do (the seventh, on the upper bout, is a useful kill switch). In practice, the layout is much less complicated than it looks. The first three simply switch the pickups on and off. This gives a remarkable range of voices: seven combinations in total. There's also a master tone on/off, mute and bass cut on/off.

The Retro-S single-coil pickups are designed as close reproductions of the originals. Hagstrom's got the look right

In use

Right from the get-go, the H-III is an enigmatic instrument. Just what is the basic clean tone? Is it the bright, clear and twangy 60s-style sound with the bass cut switch engaged? Or is it the more contemporary sound with a fuller, richer bass that you get with the .003uFD capacitor out of circuit? These pickups are very full-frequency, and this is the full-signal tone. You can certainly see why you might want to tame the bass end if you're using an old Vox, Selmer or WEM amp. However, for driving a software Fender emulation the rich, rounded and natural-sounding bass is like a gift from above. For most distorted lead tones, it's too much. However, it can help sculpt some fantastically brooding rhythm parts. Engaging bass cut and concentrating on the Hagstrom's vintage voices, there is still plenty of roundness and warmth to be had. Even the bridge unit delivers without brashness. However, it nails a clean 60s melody/lead tone. Soloed, the middle pickup is one of my favourite voices; its wide open and jazzy but very precise, while the neck unit offers a little more mid and bass colouration. Overall, the pickups feel neutral in colour and allow the natural qualities of the instrument's materials to define its sound. The guitar is particularly resonant, and even the clean sustain is excellent. With all three pickups engaged, you get an excellent chord/strumming voice that's very clean and hi-fi. It's not immediately apparent in this configuration, but the middle pickup is wired out of phase with the other two. There's a good degree of hum cancellation without the more obvious 'quackyness' Fender players will be familiar with. The switching arrangement is simple but powerful, allowing you to drop the middle pickup in and out at will. This is very useful, as you can toggle between this three-pickup chord voice and the warmer, jazzier rhythm sound created by using the neck and bridge pickups together.

The master tone switch gives a muddy, mellow chord comping voice and the mute switch knocks the output back to a fraction. You'll find vintage electric blues tones and sounds for aggressive punky, garage-rock style riffs. The H-III's natural sustain makes it a good choice for melodic lead playing as well. However, at extreme gain settings you can lose some definition – hardly a surprise, as this classic was never designed to perform in that particular arena.

Guitar VERDICT

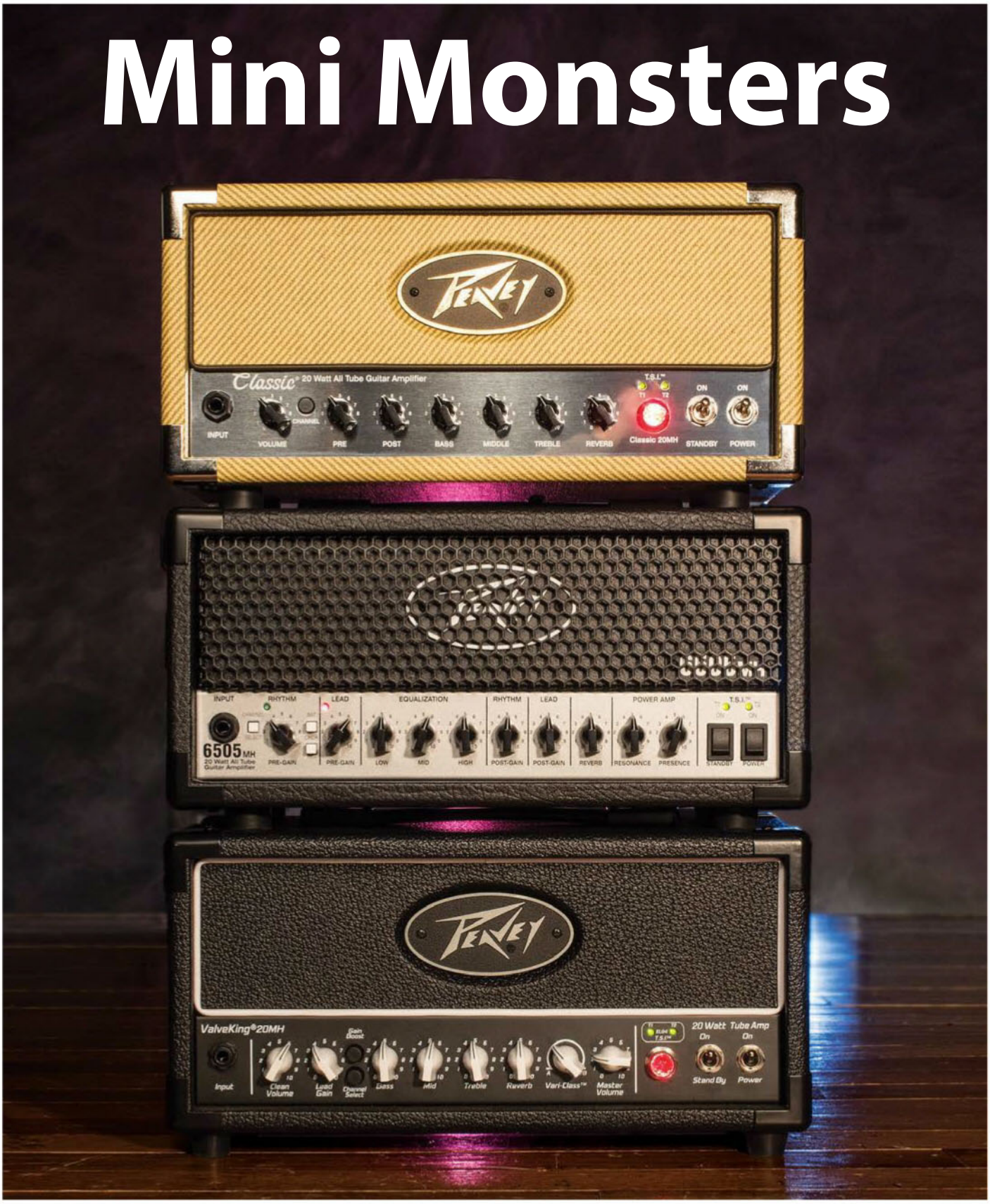
+ Excellent vintage and contemporary tones
+ Quality materials
+ Great vintage looks

– Tuning stability could be better
– Vintage-style switches may need attention over time

The H-III is simply great fun to play. It can deliver a vast range of guitar sounds – some are familiar single-coil voices and others are uniquely Hagstrom in character. The instrument is well made, feels great to play and definitely offers a signature look

8/10

Mini Monsters



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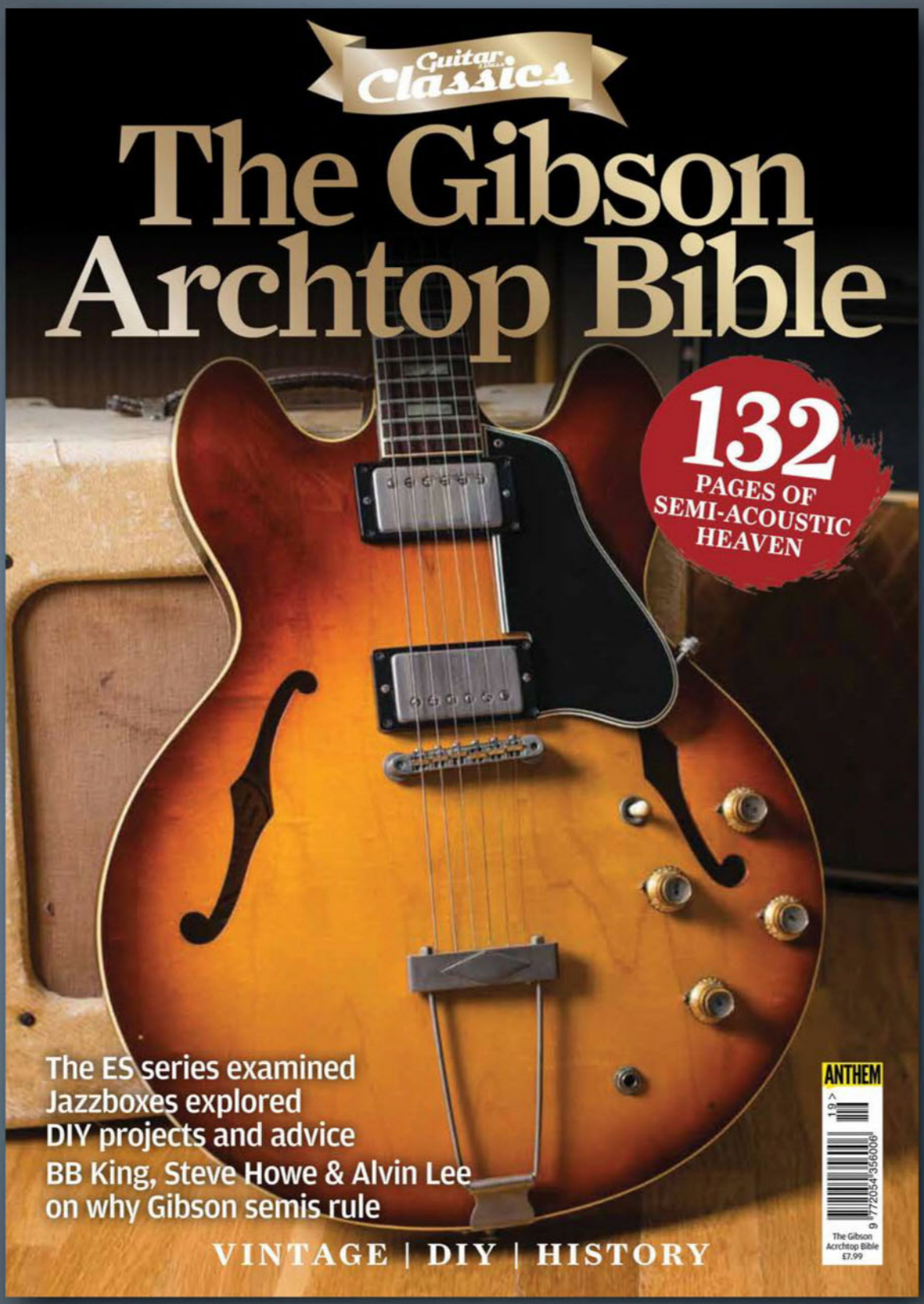

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Blackstar Artist 30 & Artist 15

These two combos offer a flavour of Blackstar's handwired Artisan series at prices that won't scare away those without deep pockets. Will **RICHARD PURVIS** be starstruck?

Since its launch nine years ago, Blackstar has established itself as one of the world's leading amplifier brands, with an array of designs at home everywhere from the living room to the festival stage. The new Artist amps are the company's vision of an 'affordable boutique' design for 2016 that draws much inspiration from the high-end, handwired Artisan models it debuted back in 2008, that are still hugely popular with touring pros and well-heeled tone hounds alike.

There are two key differences between these new Artist Series amps and the crimson-skinned Artisans, Blackstar's best-known models: the Artists are PCB-based rather than handwired, which alone must account for most of the price saving; and they're powered by 6L6 output valves rather than EL84s. In theory, this represents a shift from Voxy chime to Fendery thump, so there's clearly more to the change than just cost-cutting.

In the case of the 15-watt model in particular, using two 6L6s might seem like overkill on Blackstar's part – plenty of amps squeeze a full 40 watts from a pair of these chunky bottles. It's cathode-biased, though, which is less efficient and should also make it somewhat more squishy in response than its fixed-bias big brother. Neither model has a negative feedback loop, either.

These are tough-looking combos, clearly built with the road in mind. Not all amp techs will approve that the valves are mounted directly to the main PCB, and a health and safety-friendly metal grille over the open back means it's impossible to get to them without unscrewing the back panel to lift the chassis out completely.

Artist 30

This is a substantial black lump, with little in the way of frills, except for a silver leaf pattern framing the black control panel. The speakers are Celestion V-Types, rated at 70 watts each, and the footswitchable reverb is a digital emulation – which keeps the weight down – while a dark/light button on the bottom panel enables you to choose between moody ambience and surfy shimmer.

There's a master control, as well as individual volumes for each channel, and the obvious assumption is that for 1 and 2 we can read 'clean' and 'dirty', but that's not necessarily the case. Channel 1 is the purest path to the output stage, with just one knob to colour its tone, while channel 2 has a three-band tonestack, as well as Blackstar's familiar ISF control for 'US to UK' voicing – and, crucially, a preamp gain control.

In use

Channel 1 strides into the room with the bark of a Sergeant Major. This is a very British voice – closer to Orange than Marshall in tonality; and while the tone control is judged tastefully for dialling in just the right amount of treble for your guitar, there's no way of pushing back those insistent mids without changing channels. However, there is plenty of clean power and a trouser-flappingly solid bottom end that holds it together right up to full volume.

Channel 1 is the purest path to the output stage, with one knob to colour its tone. Channel 2 has a three-band tonestack

You won't get preamp distortion with single coils on this channel, but it does break up nicely with humbuckers. The really tasty stuff, though, comes when you turn your attention to the other >

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Blackstar Artist 30 & Artist 15

Blackstar's handwired alternatives, the **Artisan 30 £1,499** and **Artisan 15 £999**, both have EL84 output valves. So do the **Hughes & Kettner TubeMeister 36 and 18 combos £999** and **£579** respectively, but if you insist on 6L6s, then the **Fender Hot Rod DeVille ML 212 £849** is an attractive option.

end of the control panel. Push the master volume much further than halfway and, even with the preamp as low as 10 o'clock, the overdrive is rich and sticky. It gets better as you crank it all the way up to the max, and the mids-centric nature of this channel means there's no danger of the bass notes getting flubby.

Channel 2 is a more complex beast, and the first thing that means is you can pack those clonky mids into a Jiffy bag and send them off to your cousin Barry in Queensland. Even with the ISF control wound right round to the British end, this is a more hi-fi voice, warmer at the bottom and clearer at the top, with some Fender-like scoop. Keep the gain control low and the cleans are just as big as on channel 1, but fundamentally sweeter. Americanising the ISF enhances the scoop and can make the high end shrill, but between this and the three conventional EQ controls you can cover a lot of tonal ground.

We expected something a lot like the 30 but not as strident, and that's exactly what the Artist 15 delivers

The extra gain control on this channel is your gateway to full-on filth. Now, you do need to be careful how hard you push the two volume dials, as low-down stuff can start to flail a bit with both of them near the top; it doesn't scream like a really high-gain amp, but this is thick and powerful drive with not much background noise.

The reverb works well enough, and it's nice to have the choice between light and dark modes, though the difference between the two is fairly subtle. It can get rather hissy beyond the halfway point, but if you just want to add a touch of wetness for that big grimacing solo, keep it low and it'll do the job nicely.

Artist 15

You may well have noticed that the next couple of sections of the review are quite short. That's because this is, in some ways, the same amp but slightly further away. There are differences beyond the biasing we've already mentioned, however: this time, we get one Celestion V-Type and just a single footswitch for changing channels (to bypass the reverb, you have to turn it to zero). A control panel that's about three inches narrower than that on the Artist 30 means you lose the standby switch, many of the knobs are closer together and the reverb and master volume controls are forced to share a bunk bed.

In use

We expected something a lot like the 30 but not as strident, and that's exactly what the Artist 15 delivers. Half the wattage and half as many speakers means much less oomph in the bass, and it's basically a more compact, soft-edged version of the same sound. Like on the 30, channel 1 can be boxy, but it grinds nicely with the master volume maxed out – and that could be a real bonus, as a 15-watt amp at full blast is less likely to upset the neighbours (or the drummer) than a 30-watt one.

As with the other amp, the options for clean/dirty switching are limited by the fact that the two channels are voiced very differently. Then again, who needs channel switching? These amps have been designed as boutique-style pedal platforms and both get on exceptionally well with overdrive pedals.

KEY FEATURES

Artist 30

- **PRICE** £849
- **DESCRIPTION** Two-channel valve combo, made in China
- **POWER RATING** 30 watts
- **VALVES** 2x ECC83, 2x 6L6
- **TOP PANEL** Guitar input; channel 1 volume and tone; channel switch, channel two gain, volume, bass, middle, treble and ISF; reverb and master volume, standby and power switches
- **BOTTOM PANEL** 8- and 16-ohm speaker outputs, emulated DI output, reverb dark/light switch, FX loop send, return and level switch (+4dB/-10dB), input for included footswitch (channel and reverb bypass)
- **SPEAKER** 2x 12" Celestion V-Type
- **DIMENSIONS** 690x540x260mm
- **WEIGHT** 22.5kg/49.6lbs

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Big cleans and nice medium-gain overdrive on channel 2
+ Takes pedals really well
+ Sturdily built

– Reverb is hissy at higher levels
– Some may find channel 1 overly mid-heavy

The Artist 30 is a powerful, well-built workhorse and a great pedal platform

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Artist 15

- **PRICE** £649
- **DESCRIPTION** Two-channel valve combo, made in China
- **POWER RATING** 15 watts
- **VALVES** 2x ECC83, 2x 6L6
- **TOP PANEL** Guitar input; channel 1 volume and tone; channel switch, channel two gain, volume, bass, middle, treble and ISF; reverb and master volume, power switch
- **BOTTOM PANEL** 8- and 16-ohm speaker outputs, emulated DI output, FX loop send, return and level switch (+4dB/-10dB), input for included channel footswitch
- **SPEAKER** 1x 12" Celestion V-Type
- **DIMENSIONS** 612x486x258mm
- **WEIGHT** 18kg/39.7lbs
- **CONTACT** Blackstar 01604 817817 www.**blackstaramps.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Sounds like a quieter, more spongy version of the Artist 30
+ Takes pedals equally well
+ Solid, yet an easy one-hand carry

– Reverb is hissy at higher levels
– Some may find channel 1 overly mid-heavy

If you don't need the power of a 30-watter, then the Artist 15 should make for a good gigging option

8/10

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Gibson
Elektra

Guitar AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Elektra The 185

Elektra's replica of the Gibson EH-185 suggests pre-WWII amps could be pretty sophisticated beasts, as **HUW PRICE** discovers...

In 2012, Michiel Helsloot and a bunch of friends set about the task of recreating an iconic amplifier of the pre-war jazz era using modern components. The Gibson ES-185 was used by Charlie Christian and other jazz guitar pioneers, and it was quite different in topology and tone from amplifiers of the rock 'n' rolling 1950s.

Elektra's take differs from Gibson's original in several ways, but most changes were made for technical and pragmatic reasons. A 12-inch Celestion Gold alnico replaces the original, but unobtainable, field coil speaker and Gibson's unusual flip-top cabinet with its removable amp chassis is gone.

Instead, Elektra's The 185 has a sizable solid pine open back cabinet with period-style cut-outs, three bespoke leather handles and stitched leather corner protectors. Elektra's logo is stencilled onto the grille cloth using a font that closely matches Gibson's.

The earliest EH-185s had bass and treble controls. The Elektra is closer to the 1941 version of the EH-185 with a single tone control and three 6SQ7 octal preamp triodes. They feed a pair of cathode biased 'Coke bottle' 6L6s via a 6SN7 phase inverter.

Inside, it's all hand wired on turret board with carbon composite resistors and TAD paper/oil signal capacitors. Surprisingly for a 14-watt amp, there's a master control, which is actually an L-pad attenuator rather than a master volume. The gorgeous-looking faceplate accommodates a jack input for each channel, along with independent volume controls and a tone control.

In use

This is almost a tale of two amps. Through the instrument channel, the Elektra is nominally clean, but plug into the microphone channel and you're rewarded with the type of ferocious overdrive that would make Neil Young feel right at home. So let's look at each channel in greater depth.

The instrument channel allows the natural treble response of a guitar to come through, but it doesn't add top end in the manner of many late-50s tweed circuits. Fortunately this doesn't mean that there's a lack of clarity, and the Elektra brings out the finer tonal characteristics of any guitar you plug into it, while emphasising low midrange woodiness rather than upper midrange bite or twang. There's also an acoustic-like punch at the front of single notes and chords, that's followed by a >

The Elektra brings out the finer tonal characteristics of any guitar, while emphasising low midrange woodiness

The tone control introduces more fat low end and overdrive as you turn it clockwise

KEY FEATURES

Elektra The 185

- **PRICE** €2,455
- **DESCRIPTION** Two-channel class A valve combo, made in The Netherlands
- **POWER RATING** 14W
- **VALVES** 3x 6SQ7, 1x 6SN7, 2x 6L6, 1x 5U4
- **CONTROL PANEL** 2x input jacks, 2x volume, tone, master, on/off
- **SPEAKER** 1x Celestion Gold alnico 12"
- **DIMENSIONS** 570x470x300mm
- **WEIGHT** 19.3Kg
- **CONTACT** Elektra Amps www.elektra-amps.com 0031 624 626 764

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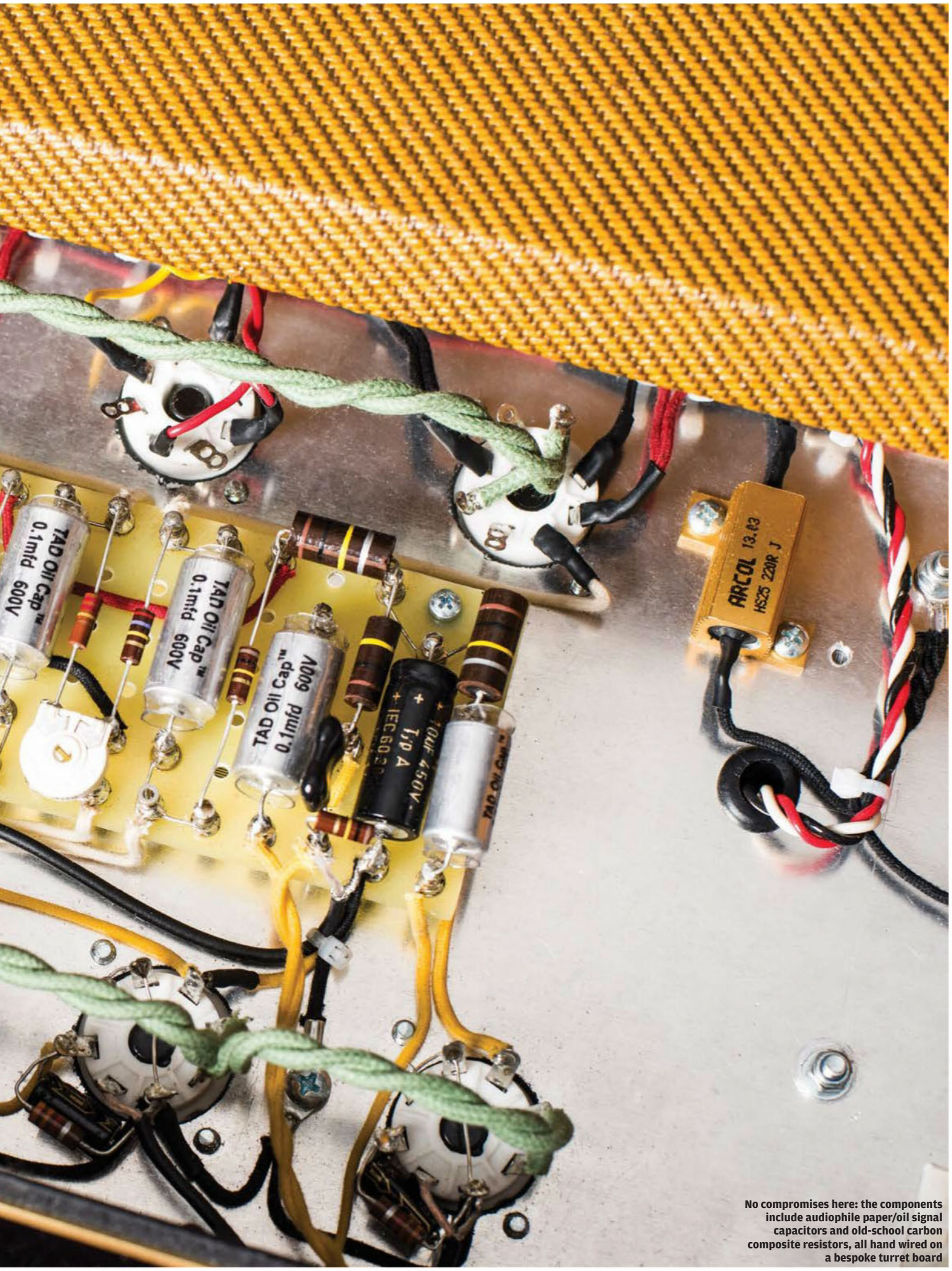

No compromises here: the components include audiophile paper/oil signal capacitors and old-school carbon composite resistors, all hand wired on a bespoke turret board

The Elektra has three 6SQ7 octal preamp triodes and two 'Coke bottle' 6L6s

Three leather handles make this a convenient amp to transport

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
The **Vintage '47 Amps VA-185G** has the looks and the sound of an EH-185, but it's less exact electronically than the Elektra. Alternatively, the **Nocturne Moonshine '39 $2,239** has a look of its own but seems close to the EH-185 circuit. Both are built to order, so contact the manufacturers for prices.

softer sustain that allows harmonics to bloom.

The tone control works like no other I have encountered. The Elektra sounds brightest with the tone fully counter-clockwise, but the effect appears to be achieved by rolling off the lows rather than boosting the highs. As the tone is turned clockwise, the sound fills out and gets fatter, while simultaneously becoming more overdriven.

At first, this may seem restrictive, but in practice it's easy to balance the desired frequency response and overdrive level because the master control is very effective and doesn't negatively affect tonal quality. Better still, you can dial in the tone that you want, and then attenuate it for home practising or, if you're using an archtop, balance the amp signal with the acoustic sound.

There's ample clean headroom for jazz players who want pure clean valve tone at home or for small gigs. The volume control can go way beyond half way before vintage-output PAFs push the Elektra into overdrive. It's a sweet, natural and endlessly intriguing clean tone that becomes almost magical when you push things a bit harder.

The Elektra is very much a vintage-style amp. If you like old-school jazz guitar tone you need look no further

The breakup comes on so gradually it's easy to dial in the sweet spot. Get it right and a strongly hit chord or single note becomes cloaked in a subtle haze of tube clipping that lends an almost horn-like bark. Crucially, it's there if you want it, and the Elektra responds to you rather than vice versa.

If you think jazz guitar is all about clean, then check out many of the old jazz guitarists and you'll hear subtle valve overdrive all over. It's miles away from blues or rock overdrive, but it's equally far removed from the dreary and soulless sounds that have blighted jazz guitar since the cubist period.

The microphone channel doesn't pick up where the instrument channel leaves off. Instead, it starts further down the dirt track with thrilling results. Rather than the biting upper mids or tightly focused lows of more conventional amps, the Elektra at full strap delivers the primal thrill of an old-school valve combo on the edge of meltdown.

Laden with harmonics, the Elektra gets pretty wild, but it's a full-bodied and smooth overdrive rather than the crunchy cut of Fender tweed or early Marshall-style circuits. The gain range is fairly wide, so there is plenty of fun to be had with the Elektra's smooth transition from mild to heavy overdrive.

At full volume, some ringing oscillation sets in, but it's not an issue because rolling back the volume a notch cures it. Overdrive and level max out before the volume control does, so nothing is sacrificed. Gibson EH-185s do exactly the same thing, so it's a circuit characteristic.

Regular single coils provide ample output to drive the Elektra, but it really sings with PAF-style humbuckers. With a Les Paul, it is easy to dial in early ZZ Top, Southern rock and 70s West Coast overdrive tones. Bass is full, treble is sweet and there's no midrange scoop.

Exactly as expected, the Elektra is very much a vintage-style amplifier. If you like old-school jazz guitar tone you need look no further, but there's much more to it. The tonal range covers mellow chime that lends itself perfectly to Travis picking and rockabilly styles. You can also get a grungey, bluesy honk, raucous garage band grind and a full-on overdrive assault.

Taking its inspiration from a 1930s design means that The 185 is unconventional, but it's certainly not too niche to enhance and round out any amplifier collection. It sounds absolutely outstanding and looks amazing, and reviewing an amplifier built with such obvious love and care has been a real pleasure.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Fabulous vintage voicing
+ Ultra sweet but clear tone
+ Very wide gain range
+ Outstanding looks and build quality
+ Very effective attenuator
+ Easy to carry

- Slight oscillation with microphone volume maxed
- Octal preamp tubes slightly noisier than modern types

A versatile and practical tone machine for modern players that also happens to be the most authentic reproduction of a 1940s Gibson EH-185 currently available

9/10

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Guitar AWARD
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9/10

Fryette Power Station

More sophisticated than passive attenuators, reactance amplifiers can boost as well as reduce your amp's output level, opening up a world of possibilities. **HUW PRICE** tests out the Fryette Power Station

The practice of feeding the line output of an attenuator into a separate power amplifier is nothing new, but all-in-one solutions certainly are. We were very taken with the solid state Bad Cat Unleash when we tried one out a while back because, in addition to sounding absolutely superb, it's very small and pleasingly lightweight. Even so, given the choice, most of us would feel more enthusiastic about having a set of power valves between our amplifier and speakers than transistors.

That's where the Fryette Power Station comes in. It's a reactance amplifier based around a 50-watt amp running a 12AX7 phase inverter and a pair of 6L6 power valves. The volume control is continually variable, so there are none of the compromises inherent with crude switched increments. This one transitions smoothly from the full 50 watts to complete silence.

The amp input and speaker outputs have independent impedance switching with 4-, 8- and 16-ohm options. So you can run a 4-ohm Fender Champ or Vibrolux into a 4-, 8- or 16-ohm cabinet, but there's no 2-ohm setting for 4x10-inch amps such as the Super Reverb and tweed Bassman.

In addition to the amp input, there's a line input, enabling users to forget all about regular guitar amps and connect digital modellers such as a Line 6 Pod, a laptop or even a tablet running amp simulation software, directly to the valve power amp and a speaker cabinet.

On the front-left, there are two voicing switches. Each one has three settings and they act on the Power Station's resistive load section. Of course, you can consider them as equalisation controls, but the primary function of the voicings is to compensate for differences in the way we perceive frequency content at various volume levels. The upper-frequency settings are edge, brite and flat, and the low settings are deep, warm and flat. At high volume, the flat settings are the default positions.

The Power Station features more conventional equalisation, too. Presence and depth adjust the power amp's frequency response and the controls are continually variable. You even have the option of using the equalisation controls and the voicing switches simultaneously.

The operate switch doubles up as a standby and bypass switch when an amplifier is connected to the amp input; it puts the Power Station into standby mode and automatically routes the amplifier output to the speaker cabinet. We'll come back to this later, when I assess whether the Power Station colours the tone at unity gain.

The Fryette Power Station is a reactance amplifier based around a 50-watt amp running a 12AX7 phase inverter and a pair of 6L6 power valves

A lot of thought has gone into the buffered effects loop. It has a low-impedance send and high-impedance return, along with a hi/lo switch to set the signal level in the loop for stompboxes and rackmount effects. You can even plug a guitar or bass directly into the power amp for loud and clean tones.

KEY FEATURES

Fryette Power Station

- **PRICE** £499
- **DESCRIPTION** One-channel valve combo, made in China
- **POWER RATING** 50W
- **VALVES** 2x 12AX7s, 2x EL84s
- **FRONT PANEL** Flat/brite/edge & flat/warm/deep, volume presence, depth, operate/bypass power
- **REAR PANEL** Line in, line out, effects send, effects return, hi/lo switch, amp in, 2x speaker out, 2x impedance switches, ground lift
- **DIMENSIONS** 91x355x228mm
- **WEIGHT** 6.8kg
- **CONTACT** Peach Guitars 01376 553016 **www.fryette.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **Bad Cat Unleash £349** is the only direct alternative to the Power Station we've seen. It's lighter, smaller and cheaper, plus it has two footswitchable channels, but the attenuator section colours the sound slightly and there's no frequency compensation.

There are two speaker outputs, but only one speaker impedance selector switch. That's no problem, because if you want to run two 16-ohm cabs you connect them to the speaker outputs and select 8 ohms. Similarly, two 8-ohm cabs in parallel require the 4-ohm setting.

If you are using just one cabinet, connect to output one, because it has an open load protection feature. If no cable is connected, the Power Station will remain locked in bypass/standby mode and the front-panel switch will become inoperative. This safety feature is designed to protect your amp if the speaker gets disconnected.

In use

I started by running a blackface Fender Vibrochamp through a closed-back cabinet with two 12-inch speakers. I dialled in the tone controls and set the volume for the Vibrochamp's edge-of-break-up sweet spot. Once I was happy, I placed the Power Station between the amp and cab, set all the tone-shaping controls for a neutral response and adjusted the level control for unity gain.

There's only one thing worth mentioning at this point – I couldn't detect any difference in tone or dynamic response, whether the Power Station was switched in or out. Although many of us equate valves with overdrive and distortion, there's a reason why they still feature in high-end hi-fi amps; in the right configuration, valves can sound fantastically clean, clear and free of distortion.

As I eased up the level control, nothing fundamental changed – except things got louder. The Vibrochamp hadn't been pushing the speakers at all, so with a bit more welly behind them I could discern more compression and richer harmonics. Therefore, any changes at higher levels are probably just speaker and cabinet colouration.

With reduced level, the perceived frequency response changes in line with expectations. There's less bass weight and you lose some cut and definition in the upper frequencies, but that's no reflection on the Power Station. The voicing switches and tone controls can be used individually or together to compensate; my preferred method was to get into the right ball park with the voicing switches and then fine tune using the tone controls.

The equalisation is so natural sounding it can also be used to enhance your tone. For instance, you can beef up the low end of a wimpy amp or tame boominess

The equalisation is so natural sounding it can also be used to enhance your tone. For instance, you can beef up the low end of a wimpy amp or tame boominess. Dark-sounding amps can be made clearer, or you can sweeten harsh edges. The point is you are in control, and you're not stuck with a sound when you attenuate.

There are only two things that prevent the Power Station from getting an unequivocal thumbs up from *Guitar & Bass*. Firstly, there's no effects loop bypass switch – either on the unit or via a footswitch. That may seem a pedantic criticism, but if you are running a digital effects unit or a tape echo in the loop, you may prefer to switch it out of the signal path when it's not being used. Secondly, I thought that having two footswitchable level presets was one of the Bad Cat Unleash's most attractive features, but the Power Station provides just one fixed setting.

In all other regards, I can't fault this product. I have two gear-nut friends who have been gigging with Power Stations for the last year or so. One attenuates his JTM45 clone and the other boosts his beloved '56 Vibrolux so he can play it at any venue, regardless of size. I can understand why they're hooked on the Power Station because it's simply outstanding.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Fabulously transparent
+ Highly effective tone shaping
+ Well thought out features
+ Onboard protection circuit
+ Robust construction
+ Quiet cooling fan
+ Can be rack mounted

- No preset level switching
- No effects loop bypass switching
- Larger and heavier than solid-state alternatives

If this was solely an attenuator, we'd be impressed, but anything that can turn a four-watt practice amp into a room-filling, fire-breathing, feedback-drenched drummer destroyer gets our vote

9/10

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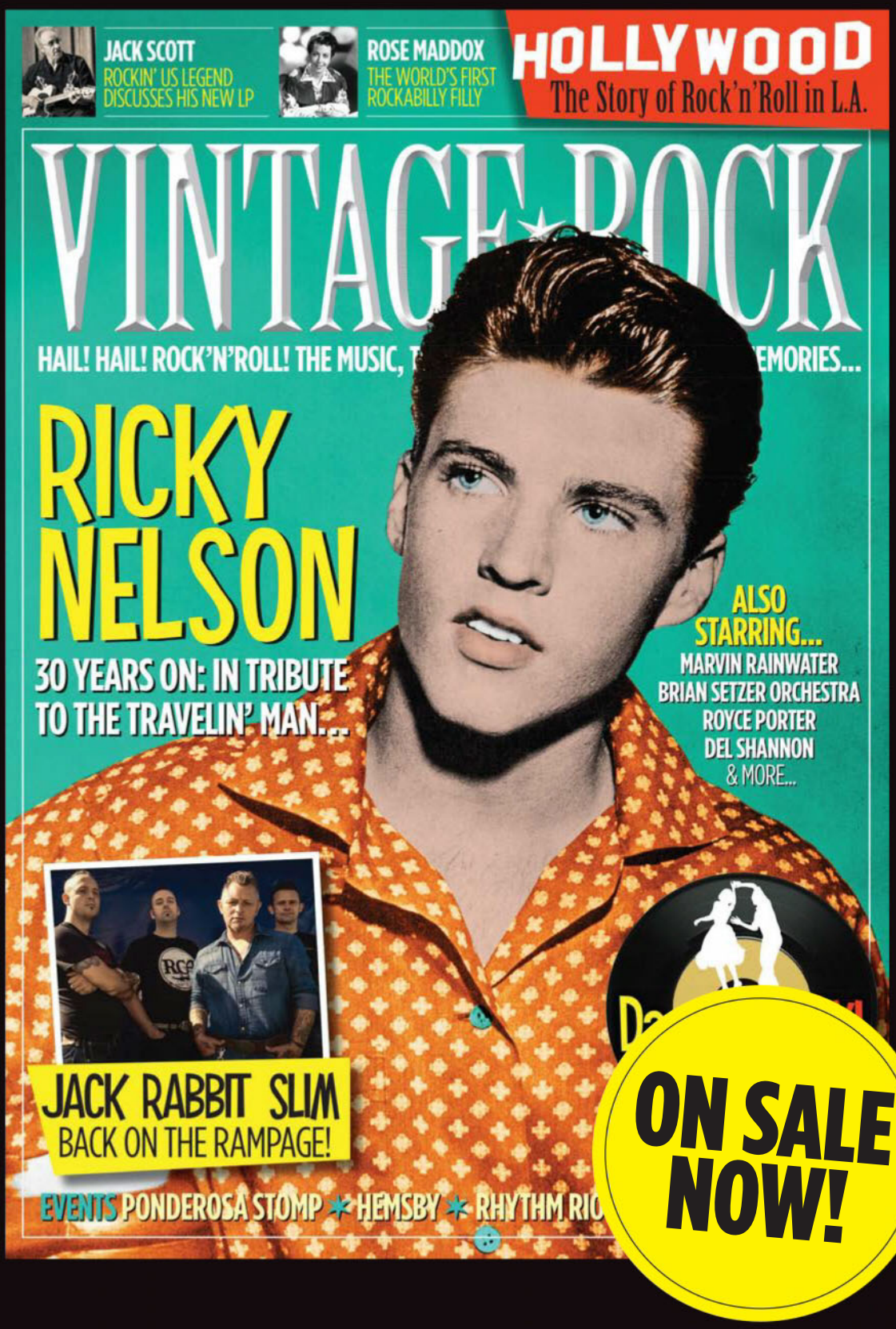

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ANTHEM PUBLISHING FROM THE MAKERS OF *GUITAR & BASS* MAGAZINE

Orange O Bass & Orange OB1-300 combo

One of the world's most distinctive amp brands turns its attention to building basses – and there's a new bass combo to boot. **GARETH MORGAN** takes both for a spin

Orange, with its distinctive styling and eye-catching hue, has been providing top-notch amplifiers for the discerning guitarist and bass player since Cliff Cooper opened for business in London in 1968. Like many well-established brands, it suffered a fallow period in the 80s, only to find salvation in the re-emergence of rock 'n' roll in all its forms in the following decade. In recent times, we've been treated to the Terror Bass amps (sadly discontinued), Orange Crush combo and, most recently, the rackmount OB series of heads and their associated cabs.

We reviewed the OB1-300 in our March 2015 issue and, being rather taken with its old-school leanings, were delighted to learn that Orange has now sought to expand this series with the release of a combo version. Its introduction also fills a gap for a loud, all-in-one unit in the company's bass amp range.

First up, Orange has finally got round to unleashing a bass on the unsuspecting public. It is, without question, aimed at the rock 'n' roll fraternity, and it's called the O Bass. Let's take a look...

Made in China, the single-cutaway O Bass has a vibe similar to Hofner's Club Bass, albeit the okouomè body is a solid chunk. You might be screaming 'Les Paul'; but, wherever we go in comparison terms, we have to admit that its downsized form with cream binding, neatly bevelled edges and tortoiseshell scratchplate cuts a rather fine figure. The top is veneered with basswood, but this detail is obscured by the opaque Off Black finish that also coats its bolt-on maple neck and the back of the headstock.

Its downsized form with cream binding, neatly bevelled edges and tortoiseshell scratchplate cuts a rather fine figure

The neck itself is a seriously comfortable, shallow 'C' contour that culminates in a cream-faced, distorted oblong headstock that's back-angled for the requisite break angle at the black synthetic nut. Besides the Orange logo and eyeball model name on the truss rod access cover, it's home to a set of traditional-looking open gear tuners with oversized cloverleaf buttons in two-a-side formation. Bordered by more cream binding, the rosewood fingerboard bears 20 medium jumbo nickel frets with not a hint of overhang at the tang, and pearloid dot markers with a further set of black dots in the upper-binding strip. For the bridge, Orange has fitted a top-loading model reminiscent of the standard Fender offering, which means it looks a bit flimsy but does the job.

Given the rock 'n' roll vibe, you won't be surprised to learn that the O Bass is electronically passive with a single Orange Custom-Wound split-coil pickup, and that the two knurled chrome controls are volume and tone.

It's worth noting that Orange supplies an alternative scratchplate with each colour. For example, our review model arrived with a spare cream plate, which you can interchange with the tortoiseshell one to your heart's content.

Sounds

The pickup type and positioning, allied to the simple twin-control attack, suggests some form of P-Bass vibe in the tone department, and the O Bass >

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Orange O Bass

Fender's **Precision Bass** is undoubtedly an inspiration here, and there are numerous choices in and around this price range, from the Affinity Series model in Olympic White at **£215** to the black-only **Squier Mike Dirnt £290** and the **Classic Vibe Precision Bass '50s** from **£405**... take your pick!

Orange OB1-300 Combo

The **Peavey Tour TKO 115** 400-watt combo **£399** offers a good range of practical variations and is priced keenly, although is a little on the heavy side. **Laney**'s **Richter RB8** 300-watt combo **£460** delivers a crunching 300 watts in an easy-to-use, wallet-friendly package. **The Fender Rumble 500 £598** is portable, classy and cool, with plenty of good tonal stuff on offer

refuses to disappoint. Wind the master tone to maximum treble and the reward is gritty and aggressive with a pleasing bottom-end thump.

The lower strings – the E especially – have plenty of purpose behind their snarl; add a midrange that's well balanced and solid, and responds with snappy punch if you dig in a bit, and you've got a rock 'n' roll animal with distinct old-school leanings that the likes of Stax's Duck Dunn would have enjoyed plying their trade on. The treble response is well attenuated, even on full boost, so thinner strings speak clearly – but without being overly clanky or brittle. This means melodic grooving is rewarding and thinner strings have plenty of body but will cut through the densest guitar mire. Winding back the tone control is fruitful: there are a number of distinct if subtle reductions in snarl and the resultant smoother tone opens up the O Bass to rootsier applications. The cool thing is that right up to just before full cut, it's punchy enough for definition and forward groove-motion... and that's simply dub-tastic!

There's a pleasing richness to your sound with decent growl to the lows, punchy midrange and natural highs

OB1-300

Dressed in the familiar mottled orange Tolex, the Chinese-made OB1-300 is a no-frills, basic rectangle which, taking into account the rubber feet it sits on and the black-finished steel corners that protect its extremities, measures 678mm high, 546mm wide and 352mm deep. Whilst an undeniably chunky lump to cart around, marine birch ply construction helps to keep the weight down to 29.65kg (65lbs) and a pair of side-mounted recessed handles make it a reasonably portable proposition. Removing the badge-adorned black grille cloth reveals cylindrical porting provision and a single 15-inch Eminence neodymium driver.

There's 300 watts of boom on offer from the amplifier section, which is basically the rackmount head slotted into the top of the cab. The control panel, with its white, black and orange sections, displays familiar quirky graphics above each black plastic control knob, the three smaller ones being a straightforward EQ section with bass (+/-15dB at 75Hz), middle (same cut, boost at 1kHz) and treble (+/-20dB at 5kHz). The three oversized controls feature volume and Orange's handy blend feature and associated gain dial. On plugging in, your signal is sent to dual preamps – clean and overdriven – so set the amount of grit with the gain and dial in as much as you require via blend, or set it and kick in the mayhem via a footswitch (not supplied). It's a concept that Orange says is inspired by the popular practice of bi-amping, without the stress of taking two separate rigs to a gig... which is nice.

As well as a balanced XLR output (with ground/lift switch), there's a line out jack socket and additional speaker output in Speakon form.

Sounds

We already know the OB1-300 head is a good piece of kit, and in combo form it works really well. There's a pleasing richness to the sound, with decent growl to the lows, dark and punchy midrange and natural-sounding highs. Tweaking the EQ is fun: boost the bass three quarters for a fat, smooth rock tone, then dial in the middle halfway to unleash heavy, snarling impact. Chopping the middle back by the same amount yields silky smooth, almost scooped mids; but there's definition to the rumble, which starts to properly shake the room when you max out the bass dial. The lack of horn and a well thought out treble control means boosting here sharpens and shines your note without inducing excessive clicks and clanks, other than near to full boost, and there's an earthy and gritty thumb tone to be had.

Essentially an 'add distortion' feature, the blend/gain function offers a good selection of nuanced mayhem. If you leave the gain at minimum, dialling blend to full induces subtle crunch and a level hike, but anything from a subtle rumble tracking your clean note to full-on noise is easy to unleash – although at the extremes your original signal is lost beneath the distorted over-blanket. Loads of fun... in fact, a bit too much!

KEY FEATURES

Orange O Bass

- **PRICE** £289, including padded gigbag
- **DESCRIPTION** Solidbody passive 4-string bass, made in China
- **BUILD** Okouomè body with basswood veneer, bolt-on maple neck with 20 medium jumbo nickel frets on a rosewood fingerboard. Open gear tuners with cloverleaf buttons and top-loading bridge. Chrome hardware
- **ELECTRICS** Orange custom-wound split-coil pickup
- **CONTROLS** Volume and tone
- **LEFT-HANDERS** No
- **FINISHES** Off-Black, Teardrop Sunburst and Orange
- **SCALE LENGTH** 864mm/34"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43mm at nut, 57mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21mm at first fret, 23mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 11mm at nut, 20mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.6kg/7.94lbs
- **CONTACT** OMEC 020 8905 2828 **www.orangeamps.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Good-quality P-Bass vibe without breaking the bank
+ Decent audible variations with single tone control
+ Well balanced and lightweight
+ Smaller body will appeal to beginners or guitarists looking to add a bass

- Not very versatile... but what do you expect?!
- Single-cutaway styling not everyone's cup of tea

Anybody after a P-type bass in a small-bodied, 34-inch scale package without taking out a second mortgage should really check out this offering from Orange

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Orange OB1-300 Combo

- **PRICE** £899
- **DESCRIPTION** Single-channel solid state bass guitar combo. Front-ported marine birch ply construction with 1x 15" Eminence neodymium speaker. Input (with active/passive switch), footswitch and line output jack sockets, balanced XLR output with ground/lift switch and Speakon extension speaker output, made in China
- **CONTROLS** Gain, volume, blend, bass, middle and treble
- **DIMENSIONS** 678x546x352mm
- **WEIGHT** 29.65kg/65.37lbs
- **CONTACT** OMEC 020 8905 2828 **www.orangeamps.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ The OB1-300 combo stands out from the crowd and is, quite simply, damn cool
+ Designed to make bassists sound good at doing their job
+ Decent range of easy-to-find, practical variations
+ The blend/gain feature offers a top-quality, versatile distortion

- A bit on the bulky side
- Some will find the EQ section a bit limited

A really good, solid, groove-playing combo that's loud enough to be put to use in a wide range of different environments – and it looks damn cool into the bargain

8/10

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Keeley Electronics 30ms Double Tracker, Abbey Chamber Verb & Memphis Sun Reverb

Capturing the sound of the world's most famous studios in a stompbox is an ambitious task. **SAM ATKINS** checks out the results...

Abbey Road. The Beatles. Pink Floyd. Elvis Presley. Sun Studio. Johnny Cash. Double tracking. The Beach Boys. *Smells Like Teen Spirit*. Are you feeling suitably warm and giddy from what those words conjure up inside you? Good, because Keeley Electronics has three DSP-brained stompboxes at the ready to sate those desires.

The 30ms Double Tracker, Abbey Chamber Verb and Memphis Sun Lo-Fi Reverb pedals effectively capture the sound and feel of the world's most famous studios and place them at our feet. To say they've sent ripples through the pedal world is an understatement, already shifting 1,000 30ms units since the pedal was announced at Summer NAMM in Nashville.

While the likes of Strymon and TC Electronic succeed at cramming numerous effects into a single enclosure, what Keeley is tapping into – and rather successfully here – is the fact that many players also enjoy single-pedal units that produce one or two perfectly realised tones. Having said that, 2016 holds some very exciting news, which Robert Keeley shares with *G&B* in the interview with the effects guru on page 83.

Abbey mode reproduces the double-tracking effect from those famous studios in London with added modulation

On amp duties for this review, *G&B* has enlisted the help of a Fender '68 Princeton Custom and a Supro Thunderbolt, with a Custom Shop '56 Fender Stratocaster and a Gibson Les Paul Standard, along with a Fender Rumble V3 500 and a Gibson SG Bass for those low-down sonic expeditions!

30ms Double Tracker

The 30ms, referring to 30 milliseconds of double-tracked effect, has been particularly popular with Keeley, which is valiantly trying to keep up with demand. Let's start with what double tracking actually is. In the most simplistic form, it is the doubling up of your signal (guitar, bass, vocals or keys), creating a lush, wide and 'doubled up' sound as if two of you were playing in perfect unison, albeit with a very slight delay.

You have three switchable modes: Dimension, producing two voices that can be detuned and delayed by, you've guessed it, 30ms; Abbey mode, which reproduces the double-tracking effect from those famous studios in London, with added modulation simulating the manual effort of slowing a tape machine; and, finally, Slapback, which unlocks the delay time available from 30ms to 120ms with two doubled-up voices. But that's not all! Along with those modes is the added bonus of >

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

30ms ADT

The **Strymon Deco £249** is a tape saturation and double tracker pedal, which creates lush-sounding slapback delays, tape echoes, tape flanging and tape chorusing. Using the **EHX Pitch Fork Pitch Shifter £124** in dual mode will get you close to ADT territory.

Abbey Chamber Verb

The **EHX Holy Grail Neo £90** has three modes for Hall, Spring and Plate effects in a compact enclosure. **TC Electronic's Hall Of Fame £60** is a great option and allows you to beam patches from your phone.

Memphis Sun Reverb

Caroline Guitar Co.'s **Meteore £169** is an analogue lo-fidelity reverb pedal with plenty of options to tweak your reverb sound. **Tech 21**'s **Analogue Reverb Emulator £149** not only nails those warm vintage reverb tones but also manages to pack in a 9dB clean boost.

a Pro mode (with dip switches inside the pedal), which changes the control layout, dropping the reverb option in favour of complete control over the double-tracked sounds (using the tune knob to dial in whatever flat/sharp tones you desire). Let's not forget that you can use a standard mono cable or a TRS cable, feeding the dry signal to one amp and the double-tracked signal to another.

We should also mention that Keeley has shoe-horned in a little of that Studio Two magic with a glorious Abbey Road-style reverb, too!

In use

With all knobs at 12 o'clock and the Abbey mode selected, it's difficult not to rip into a few Beatles licks and Pink Floyd numbers with a huge grin on your face. You'd perhaps be forgiven for thinking that this is a glorified chorus pedal, but the reality is it's much more than that. It brings your rig and guitar sound to life without sounding artificial. Though subtle in its purest form, what you have at your feet is the flavour of a legendary recording studio in a pedal enclosure.

For the gigging musician already enjoying a stereo rig, or the player experimenting with using two amps, a 30ms on your pedalboard is a seriously tempting addition. Hooking the Princeton and Supro up together, *G&B* used the internal dip switches to send the dry unaffected signal to the Supro for that tight controlled tone that the Thunderbolt does so well and the full wet double-tracked sound to the Princeton, which is pure aural ecstasy. We've written a lot about the various functions on offer, which may seem complicated, but worry not, as to have this level of control and sound in a live rig straight out of the box is exactly what single-switch pedals should be all about. Should you wish to unlock Pandora's Box you can, but you can also take the simple approach.

We cannot think of any genre of music the 30ms would fail to add something positive to. We also demoed the pedal with a Gibson SG Bass into an already huge-sounding Fender Rumble 500 and the 30ms delivered a noticeable treble lift, enough to make us want to run two Rumbles! Using a Keeley 1962 British-style overdrive pedal with the 30ms slightly detuned in Dimension mode and a dirty-sounding Princeton opens up a huge palette of easily recognisable classic rock and even metal tones (Metallic's *Enter Sandman* sounding particularly tasty). And let's not forget the Slapback mode for those crisp country-style runs up and down the neck. All in all, the 30ms is a versatile and joyful pedal to use, which players from all over the musical spectrum will get something from, and it puts a big silly grin on your face.

Refreshingly, the marketing blurb stands up to the weight of expectation, and we would have to agree that the 30ms is the "ultimate double tracking experience" in stompbox form.

KEY FEATURES

Keeley 30ms Automatic Double Tracker

- **DESCRIPTION** Double-tracker, stereo effect pedal, offers studio-style doubling effects used for creating thicker, fuller-sounding instruments. Also included in the effect pedal is a reverb that simulates the famous chamber in Studio Two
- **PRICE** £149
- **CONTROLS** Three switchable modes with controls for pitch, delay time and output level, pro mode using internal dip switches
- **FEATURES** Standard 9V DC centre negative (65mA+ draw), mono or stereo output with a TRS cable (not included)
- **DIMENSIONS** 112x60x30mm
- **CONTACT** robertkeeley.com

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Three excellent modes
+ Wonderful sounds
+ Stereo capability with TRS cable
+ Great for bass, keyboards and vocals

– Dedicated mono and stereo outputs would have been good

A high-quality pedal with a plethora of double-tracking options available. Handling multiple instruments and vocals makes this a must-try pedal.

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Keeley Abbey Chamber Verb

- **DESCRIPTION** Emulation of the Abbey Road Studio echo room chamber, including the corresponding high-pass filter and brilliance control for soft and warm vintage reverb
- **PRICE** £149
- **CONTROLS** Decay, pre-delay, brilliance, blend & 3-way mini toggle switch for the brilliance control's frequency point
- **FEATURES** Standard 9V DC centre negative (65mA+ draw)
- **DIMENSIONS** 112x60x30mm
- **CONTACT** robertkeeley.com

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Nails Abbey Road sound
+ Plenty of options to fine tune
+ Looks fantastic

– Look elsewhere for lengthy reverb tones
– Most players would use with another reverb for more options

A unique, if limited, reverb pedal that emulates faithfully the 'Abbey Road' sound. Shoegazers and endless reverb lovers need to look elsewhere.

7/10

KEY FEATURES

Keeley Memphis Sun Lo-Fi Reverb

- **DESCRIPTION** Lo-Fi slapback echo, room reverb and automatic double tracker, a recreation of the classic Memphis studio room
- **PRICE** £149
- **CONTROLS** Time, regen/mod, reverb & mix, three switchable modes ECHO 600 (echo for long delays & room reverb), Sun Thomann mode (auto track-doubling and slapback with short delays & room reverb), reverb (room reverb studio simulation)
- **FEATURES** Standard 9V DC centre negative (65mA+ draw)
- **DIMENSIONS** 112x60x30mm
- **CONTACT** robertkeeley.com

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Versatile for guitar and bass
+ Sounds amazing, with warm analogue tones
+ Includes ADT functions
+ Vintage styling

– Only mono output

A pedal that combines not only double-tracking effects but realistic warm analogue reverb sounds, too. Highly recommended for both guitar and bass players.

9/10

Abbey Chamber Verb

Staying with the Abbey Road theme, we have the Abbey Chamber Verb, recreating the echo chambers found within those famous walls. An echo chamber is an isolated booth inside a recording studio designed to capture natural reverb sounds from a signal piped into it. It gets a little more complicated after that, as the men in white coats developed an array of electronic filters and switchable frequency levels (2.7 kHz, 3.5 kHz, or 10 kHz) all thankfully replicated here in pedal format (wearing a white coat whist using the Abbey Chamber Verb is optional).

In use

The Chamber Verb is designed to deliver warm analogue-sounding reverb tones aplenty, so if you're in the market for a reverb that creates incredibly long decays and space-like reverberations you should look elsewhere. Looking for a small room sound with a soft short reverb? No problem. Perhaps a large hall reverb

sound that is bright and reflective? Yep, does that too.

The brilliance and pre-delay knobs on the Chamber Verb are where the magic happens. Those men in white coats again developed a way of refining what sort of naturally occurring reverb sounds were produced in the echo chambers at Abbey Road, and by using the brilliance option you can boost or cut the frequency response (+/-10dB) along with using the switchable 2.7kHz, 3.5kHz or 10kHz for added effect. The pre-delay has a range of 30ms to 150ms, so with little effort we were able to dial in some realistic echo chamber reverb sounds. What impressed us the most was the pairing of the 30ms Double Tracker with the Abbey Chamber Verb.

These pedals are designed to appeal to players who want to achieve studio-like tones live without the need for complicated DAW software or an engineering degree with some carpentry skills thrown in. And let's not discount the aesthetics either, as these pedals look the business, too – and who doesn't like good looking pedals on their boards?

In use

Similar to the 30ms Double Tracker, the Memphis Sun has three switchable modes available: Echo 600 offering a lo-fi echo with a small room reverb effect, Sun mode with double tracking, modulated slapback echo with the small room reverb and, finally, the Room setting, which offers up the same reverb effect but with pre-delay and variable filtering.

What's instantly recognisable when playing is that the reverb is subtly compressed, which successfully emulates what happens to loud sounds in a small space. It's that level of detail that makes playing with the Memphis Sun so much fun.

Most players, like us, will go straight to the Sun mode and attempt our best early rock 'n' roll licks, and perhaps even a bit of chicken pickin' to really immerse ourselves in the 1950s sound. Keeley has added ADT to the Sun mode, which wasn't around in those days but certainly doesn't detract; in fact, it adds a lovely warm-sounding double-track effect and another vintage-sounding flavour to the pedal's arsenal. In this mode, adjusting the delay time between 30-180ms, we are firmly in slapback territory, and using the regen/mod knob to dial in some modulated 'tape' screams Carl Perkins and Junior Parker.

Keeley has added ADT to the Sun mode, which wasn't around in the day but certainly doesn't detract

Memphis Sun Reverb

The Memphis Sun Reverb continues with the studio-in-a box theme, but this time has both feet planted firmly in the 1950s. The legendary Sun Studio in Memphis, Tennessee is a small unassuming building but has played host to some of the biggest names in the industry. Elvis Presley recording *That's All Right*, Jerry Lee's *Great Balls Of Fire*, and let's not forget Johnny Cash singing about walking the line. All within the walls of Sun Studio, which proudly and confidently terms itself 'The birthplace of rock and roll'.

So, then, what exactly is the Sun Studio sound represented here in pedal form? What you're getting is a unique small room reverb pedal (simulating the hallowed 33x18ft asbestos-tiled room) with added slapback, along with ADT (auto double tracking). But this isn't a one-trick pony pedal, as like the 30ms Double Tracker and Abbey Chamber Verb there's a lot happening under the hood.

Echo 600 is the mode that puts an even bigger grin on our faces. With a delay time from 30ms to 666ms (a nod to the devil's music, naturally) that is filtered, compressed and filtered again creates the illusion that you are playing in a small studio space. All this filtering makes the signal almost tape saturated with an edge of subtle distortion, which would make contemporary retro stylists such as Dan Auerbach and Jack White feel very much at home.

Emulating the sound of legendary studios and cramming studio-like effects into a standard pedal enclosure is an interesting and brave concept, but Keeley Electronics has delivered the goods. These are high-quality gig-ready pedals that would happily remain on pedalboards (for guitar, bass, keyboards and even vocals) for years to come.

Robert Keeley

2015 was the year that Keeley Electronics added a boatload of new pedals to its already comprehensive range and collaborated with JHS Pedals on the Steak & Eggs compressor/overdrive, but 2016 looks set to be even busier. We caught up with Robert, looked back on his amazing year and asked about his plans for the coming 12 months...

Q You've had an incredibly busy year to say the least! What have been your personal highlights?

"I thought 2014 was crazy, but 2015 has been the most prolific year for us. We have released more than 20 pedals. We started the year with the Aurora Reverb, Recino Delay and DynaTrem from our DSP development that showcased at the January NAMM show in Los Angeles, moved on to a very popular trio of pedals this summer including the Oxblood Overdrive, 1962 British Drive and the 30ms Double Tracker, finishing the year with the Seafoam Plus and Multi Echo. Keeley's last release of the year will be the Gold Star vinyl reverb. One more addition to our Keeley Engineering Studio Themed Reverbs. It's an imaginative look at what a modern Phil Spector/Gold Star Studios studio might sound like. It has compressed reverb, distorted reverb and Sun Drenched Vinyl."

Q What inspired or prompted you to make the 30ms, Abbey Chamber Verb and Memphis Sun?

"After we put together the 30ms package with Abbey Road Studios in mind, our imagination just took off, and that's when it seemed like Studio Themed Reverbs were a way for us to flex our new DSP muscles and give us a creative platform for effects design. Many times in the past we would offer something new by changing up drives or fuzzes, or maybe putting together a really limited fuzz with some exceptionally rare parts. Now we are able to dream things and make them come true in short order."

Q The forums have been set alight by players and producers wanting the 30ms – have the sales matched the level of interest?

"The 30ms has been the hit single for the second half of this year. We announced it at the Summer NAMM in Nashville, and we have built 1,000 in the first three months. It's relatively unique. The true double tracker with +/- pitch shifting, short delay time controllability, reverb, etc has been popular enough that we've incorporated versions in our Memphis Sun and Seafoam!"

Q What does 2016 hold for Keeley Electronics? Are there any other 'studio' pedals on the horizon?

"We plan on going to Capitol Records to take measurements of the reverb chambers Les Paul designed. A first-hand experience with our own measurements should give us plenty of data to chew on. "We also plan on releasing more multi-effect units similar to our old Tone Workstation. We plan on releasing several Multi-Drive and DSP pedals that are a mix of analogue distortion, overdrive or compression, along with a DSP-based delay, reverb or modulation that would make them a complete, compact solution. In 2016, our platform will include web or app-based user configuration or programming. We plan on increasing our DSP platform to include Analog Devices-made processors, like the SHARC and Blackfin to allow us to fully utilise our experience in digital signal processing. Lastly, we are working with record producers to do a 'Producer-Themed' line of effects. These will include tones developed to sound like your favourite studio engineer. 2016 is gearing up to be huge!"

Guitar AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Hartke VXL Bass Attack Tone-Shaper Preamp

Hartke's new bass pedal soups up the humble preamp formula. **GARETH MORGAN** puts it to the test...

KEY FEATURES

Hartke VXL Bass Attack Tone-Shaper Preamp pedal

- **PRICE** £79
- **DESCRIPTION** Designated bass guitar preamp/tube emulation (distortion), DI pedal without true bypass
- **CONTROLS** Bass, treble, brite, harmonics, mix, shape, level; ground/lift (turns phantom power on/off) and pre/post switches
- **FEATURES** 2x stomp switches, XLR DI out, line out, parallel out and input jack sockets
- **DIMENSIONS** 152x167x61mm
- **CONTACT** Korg UK 01908 304 635 **www.korguk.com/hartke/**

If you only ever use one pedal, a tone fixer – whether in the form of a booster, line driver or preamp – is a sensible choice. These usually offer volume boost with EQ shaping, often with a sweepable frequency control, and Hartke's swanky new VXL Bass Attack pedal does not buck that trend. It also seasons the selection with the addition of a harmonics control, a tube emulation feature and a DI output with ground/lift switch – enabling use as a direct box for connection to a PA or for recording.

The VXL comes in the form of a wedge-shaped metal box, the top and back having a businesslike black finish (save for the grey control panel) and grey sides. At 152mm wide, 167mm deep and 61mm high, it's about twice the standard stompbox size and weighs about twice as much. Connectivity is around the sides, the previously mentioned DI being accompanied by input, parallel output and line output jack sockets – plus a pre/post switch. Press this for post mode if you're using the VXL for shaping, leave it out if not, and note the parallel out socket always emits a clean signal.

Control-panel wise, it's a dizzying array, but note that the cut/boost bass, treble and level controls are active on plugging in, so try to remember to set them flat – specifically centre position, or 5 on the dial. The remaining features are enabled via two stomp switches. On the right, on/off activates harmonics, mix (dry to wet) and brite, the latter offering cut/boost to higher frequencies. The shape switch activates the sweepable shape control, offering various preset EQ curves as tonal starting points. The VXL can be either battery powered (accessed by quick-release cover on the bottom) or via a nine-volt power supply (not supplied).

Engaging the basic two-band EQ provides degrees of practical width without the loss of definition

Sounds

While not massively sophisticated, engaging the basic two-band EQ provides degrees of practical width without loss of definition and decent cut and bite. The remaining EQ control, brite, works in conjunction with the harmonics feature, adding extra sparkle to your tone in warm tube mode and upping the spiteful edge when properly overdriven.

The overdrive itself is a decent facsimile of the warm snarl that valves provide, but the key to this function – as is often the case with distortion/overdrive effects – is the mix dial. You can have a bit of grunt tracking your clean notes, right through to full-on mayhem – Jack Bruce's classic Cream-era snarl is pretty easy to approximate.

With the shape control, rotating anti-clockwise uncorks starting-point sounds that are thinner and more lightweight, with good barking, raspy variations you'll find useful for gigs with hollow-stage bass trap syndrome, or where more contemporary, nuanced tones are required. If you're surrounded by glass and stone, rotate clockwise and you'll find plenty of thick, thudding boom on offer.

The basic EQ remains active at all times, so if you want more width and thud – or more cut and bite with any shape or harmonics variation – you'll find judicious use of the bass and treble dials creates powerhouse punch or vicious, edgy overdrive.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE... **Markbass' Super Booster £128** offers clean boost, with VPF and VLE filters and balanced DI out. The **Xotic Bass RC Booster £169** has gain and volume boost without colouring your tone and a handy two-band EQ. The **MXR M81 Bass Preamp £142**, with its three-band EQ, gain and volume controls and sweepable midrange control, is another good option.

Guitar VERDICT

+ Versatile and easy to use
+ Plenty of scope for solving a wide range of tonal issues or juicing up your tone
+ Rugged construction
+ Excellent value for money

- Not much, although true bypass switching would be a useful addition

Superb value for money, this excellent little preamp with versatile distortion may become your most treasured pedal

9/10

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McNelly Pickups

If McNelly pickups are anything to go by, there really is a tone in North Ontario. **HUW PRICE** tries some naughty 90s

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
For P-90 tones in T-type format, you could check out the **Fralin Steel Pole £159** or the **Creamery Custom Tele-90 £147**. Humbucker-sized P-90 options include the **Bare Knuckle Mississippi Queen £199** and the **House Of Tone Heavy House P94 £140** (all priced in sets).

There is something about P-90 pickups that never gets old. They have featured prominently in every musical genre, from jazz and rockabilly to blues-rock, punk and even contemporary rock.

The point is that P-90s have proved themselves to be the most versatile of all the classic pickups. Despite the ongoing allure of the PAF, many would argue that the P-90 was Gibson's best ever pickup design. So what can you do if you want P-90 tones from a stock Telecaster or from a guitar that was built for humbuckers?

Fortunately, there are now plenty of innovative pickup manufacturers, such as McNelly Custom Guitars, that are willing to move beyond standard formulas, and P-90 sound-alike pickups come in all shapes and sizes.

Tim McNelly began building custom guitars in Ontario, Canada, and always preferred to wind his own pickups. Those pickups proved very popular, and demand grew to the extent that he now concentrates exclusively on pickup winding. He and his small team supply pickups to numerous boutique guitar makers and have appointed Home Of Tone as the UK distributor.

McNelly pickups are made with modern poly-insulated magnet wire. It's chosen for ease of working, and McNelly considers it optimal for his pickup designs. Clearly an innovator, his designs have a stamp of individuality and the pickups are made from bespoke parts rather than off-the-shelf factory bits and pieces. You can also order them in various covers, colours and styles.

T-Bar

Intended as drop-in replacements, the T-Bar set should require no routing or alterations to fit into a standard Tele-type guitar. This means that both wire coils are taller and skinnier than a regular P-90's, but you do get chunky magnets beneath the coils and height-adjustable polepieces. The magnets are ceramic rather than vintage-spec alnico alloy and the coils are wound with 43 AWG magnet wire.

McNelly Pickups are made with modern poly-insulated magnet wire. McNelly considers it optimal for his designs

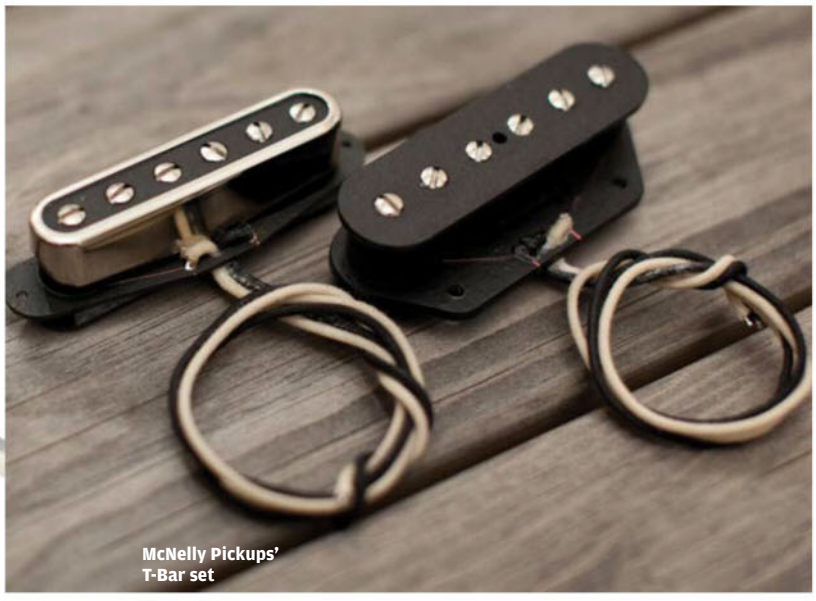
I installed this set in a T-type with a maple neck and a lightweight swamp ash body. The bridge is a standard pressed-steel item with three brass saddles. McNelly stipulates that the T-Bar set should really be used with 500K pots and a 0.022uF tone capacitor in order to get the full frequency range. My T-type has 250K pots – which McNelly says will result in a darker tone.

In use

Putting the T-Bar-loaded T-type up against a Gibson ES-330 proved illuminating. Despite the 250K potentiometers, the T-type sounded slightly brighter than the mellow old Gibson, but nowhere near as bright as regular Tele pickups.

The contrast between the two T-Bars is great in every sense. The bridge pickup sounds very full in the mids, and while the harmonic overtones are fairly dense and the treble is sweetly rolled off, when you switch to the neck position the tone becomes bigger, clearer and purer.

For soloing, the neck pickup certainly captures a lot of the rounded


McNelly Pickups' T-Bar set

The Stagger Swaggers come in various cover options, the most popular being open nickel and full nickel

and flutey quality I associate with P-90s, and chords have a really superb chime without sounding at all trebly. In fact, the tonal balance of the neck pickup is spot on.

The bridge is more about controlled aggression, with a pronounced upper-midrange honk that is uncannily like a real P-90. I'd be inclined to follow McNelly's advice and extend the treble with a set of 500Ks to get the optimum effect – but this set does sound pretty remarkable.

The T-Bars do diminish a T-type's tendency to twang, but you get a softer and woodier growl instead

The T-Bars do diminish a T-type's tendency to twang, but you get a softer and woodier growl instead. In fact, the neck pickup made my guitar sound almost like a semi-acoustic. A smooth string-to-string balance replaces the usual spiky attack and the T-Bars' sensitivity makes them sustain superbly and respond beautifully to playing touch.

Inevitably, the instrument's wood and hardware have some influence on the tone, so don't expect the T-Bar set to instantly transform your Tele into a Les Paul Special. That said, it's pretty remarkable how close McNelly has come.

Stagger Swagger

Despite appearances, these pickups are nothing like the Fender Wide Range humbucker that was fitted to Tele Customs and Deluxe models during the 1970s. The Stagger Swagger features two coils for humbucking purposes only, with just three active poles per coil. That means one polepiece per string. In contrast, true Wide Range humbuckers have 12 poles, with six hidden under the cover.

The Stagger Swagger is apparently McNelly's most popular model, and it features alnico 4 magnets with 42 AWG magnet wire. They're the same size as a standard humbucker, and we used a Les Paul for testing with 500K pots and 0.022uF tone capacitors.

In use

The fact that the Stagger Swaggers sound less like P-90s than the T-Bars came as a bit of a surprise to us. However, that doesn't mean that they are without charms of their own. They're certainly quiet like humbuckers, but the tone is much closer to what you might expect from Fender-type single coils than an authentic P-90.

Both Stagger Swaggers are crystal clear and the frequency response extends higher than the T-Bars'. Some of that may be attributable to potentiometer values, but the extent of the disparity suggests other factors are at play.

The bridge pickup has less of the throaty midrange honk and more of a snappy quack and twang. The neck pickup isn't as woody as the T-Bar, but it has a shimmering clarity and superb pick definition. So, they're somewhat less P-90-like, but judged on their own merits, the Stagger Swaggers are superb-sounding pickups. You get single-coil clarity and attack, but the muscularity and scale of the Les Paul tone continues to underpin everything.

It's something unique. Clearer and more precise than a Filter'Tron, too meaty to be Stratty and too hi-fi for a P-90. If pushed, I would say the Stagger Swaggers most closely resemble the DeArmond single coils that Gretsch used in the 1950s.

I've played humbucker-sized P-90s that sound more authentic than the Stagger Swaggers, but that hardly seems to matter. These beautiful-sounding pickups could inject life into the most unremakable guitars. As for the T-Bars, I'm completely sold. They get remarkably close to the real deal sonically, and if I had a spare Telecaster I would probably be emptying my piggy bank.

KEY FEATURES

T-Bar Set

- **PRICE** £149
- **DESCRIPTION** P-90-style pickups in T-type format, made in Canada
- **SPECS** 43 AWG poly-insulated magnet wire, ceramic magnets, adjustable polepieces, vulcanised fibreboard flat work, wax potted
- **CONTACT** Home Of Tone 07976 972884 **www.mcnellyguitars.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Remarkably P-90-like sound
+ Very clean build quality
– Some loss of T-type twang

If you want your Telecaster to sound like a Les Paul Special, this is probably as close as you can get without reaching for the router

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Stagger Swagger Set

- **PRICE** £179
- **DESCRIPTION** Humbucker-sized P-90-inspired pickups with hum-cancelling coils, made in Canada
- **SPECS** 42 AWG poly-insulated magnet wire, alnico 4 magnets, adjustable polepieces, vulcanised fibreboard flat work, wax potted
- **CONTACT** Home Of Tone 07976 972884 **www.mcnellyguitars.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Exceptional clarity and definition
+ Very clean build quality
– Not really like P-90s in tone

These sound more like 1950s DeArmonds than P-90s, but that's certainly not a bad thing. Clear, clean and responsive

8/10

Shure GLXD16 Beta Digital Wireless Guitar System

A pro-standard digital wireless system with a receiver that doubles as a tuner. Can there be life after leads for **SIMON BRADLEY**?

KEY FEATURES

Shure GLXD16 Beta Digital Wireless Guitar System

- **PRICE** £349. Additional GLDX1 transmitters cost £185
- **DESCRIPTION** A digital wireless system for guitar and bass that includes a GLXD1 transmitter and GLXD6 pedalboard receiver, plus a WA305 instrument cable, a rechargeable lithium-ion battery, battery charger and 12v 400mA PSU for the receiver. Made in China
- **CONTROLS** Link, mode, group and channel buttons, plus footswitch on receiver; link button, on/off switch on transmitter
- **CONTACT** Shure Distribution 01992 703058 **www.shure.co.uk**

Wireless guitar systems have come a long way since John Nady came up with the first prototype way back in 1968. Shure's new GLXD16 system includes a GLXD1 bodypack transmitter and GLXD6 receiver, as well as all the connectors and a rechargeable battery – and what makes the set-up of added interest is that the receiver is designed to be placed on your effects board. It doubles as a chromatic tuner and the display can even show the transmitter's remaining battery life in real time.

The system does its stuff within the 2.4GHz frequency band, the so-called Industrial, Scientific and Medical radio band, and can deal with up to eight separate wireless audio channels. Additional GLDX1 transmitters are available (at £185) and you simply select a channel via the receiver, link the two with the push of a button and away you go. It really is that simple.

Should interference be detected, Shure's LINKFREQ Automatic Frequency Management technology causes both the transmitter and receiver to search automatically within the band to find a new frequency and clean up the signal, all with no drop-out. Stepping on the receiver's footswitch mutes the output to allow you to either use the tuner or select a new linked receiver as you change guitars, and you can also access features such as the regulation of output gain.

The transmitter uses a quarter-inch jack, and, at 46x95x133mm, the receiver won't take up too much pedalboard room either.

What makes this set-up of added interest is that the receiver is designed to be placed on your effects board

In use

Let's address an important point at the outset: in comparison with using a cable, our wireless tone was undeniably brighter and louder. Here's where we'd talk about a cable's impedance and capacitance, but this difference is an unavoidable consequence of using a wireless system. The receiver does provide an option to alter the gain of the output, while the trebly edges can be rounded off with EQ.

Shure suggests that, for optimum performance, the distance between transmitter and receiver should be no greater than 60 metres. Unless you're The Edge or Angus Young, we're confident that will suffice for most players, and we wandered – guitar in hand – to the bottom of our modest yard with neither loss of signal nor any latency. Experiments with playing in unrealistically close proximity to the TV, a wi-fi router and our pedalboard's studding of power supplies didn't add unduly to the background noise.

The question is, do you need a wireless system? If you're a pro who's regularly stood many feet from your backline in sizeable venues, then a high-quality unit such as this should be given serious consideration. It's robust in the extreme, simple to set up and, in our experience, operates flawlessly. If you play live only occasionally and, when you do, it's most likely to be in pubs and small clubs, a wireless system may be an unnecessary complication.

However, you'll have to go a long way to beat what this Shure wireless system offers and, much like many experiences in life, you'll never forget your first time should you opt to go wireless.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE... The **Line 6 Relay G70 £330** is based around a pedalboard receiver and includes the Cable Tone feature. **Sennheiser**'s **EW 172 G3 £368** and the **Samson AirLine 77 £264** utilise an amp-top receiver, while **Smooth Hound**'s **Classic Wireless £149** offers great value.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Easy to use
+ Clarity of signal
+ Convenience of pedalboard receiver

- Your tone will alter
- Additional transmitters add to the expense
- May not be necessary for everyone

Robust, well designed and easy to use, this is an a impressive, if somewhat costly, system

8/10

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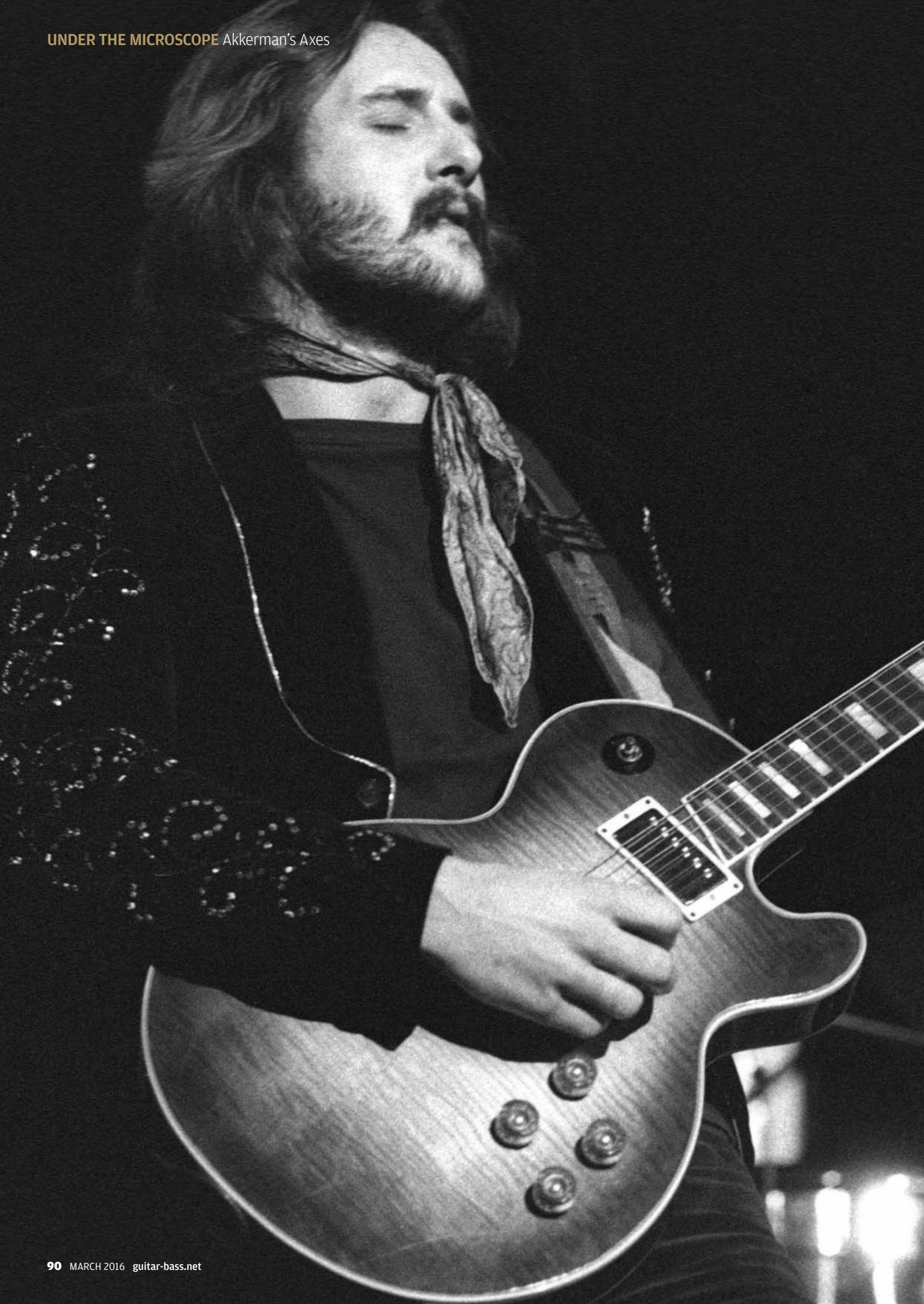


AKKERMAN'S AXES

Guitar & Bass travels to Amsterdam to examine the Dutch guitarist's stunning vintage Gibson Les Paul Personal and his new signature Brandin Personal II

Story and photography **Steve Clarke**

Anyone who remembers seeing Focus on the *Old Grey Whistle Test* TV show could not fail to note the incredible playing of the guitarist in the band – Jan Akkerman. He was using a black, twin-pickup Les Paul Custom that, from early pictures of this guitar with its 'witch hat' volume and tone knobs, looks like the post-68 reissue.

Not much later, Akkerman changed the front pickup to a Gretsch Filter'Tron, and eventually another was fitted in the bridge position. He apparently wired it wrongly and it was out of phase, but nonetheless it started a lot of tongues wagging as to what was going on with this modification. Akkerman has never been afraid to try various combinations of pickup and wiring options, nor to try custom-made guitars in the quest for great tone (it's the Akkerman acumen approach!).

Today, we are in Amsterdam catching a train to Gilze Rijen, where we will meet Peter Herwegh, the owner of Brandin Guitars. We visit the factory where the Les Paul Personal that Jan also used in Focus has been brought for us to examine. Akkerman played this guitar from around 1971 in Focus and continues to do so today. It has provided the inspiration for a new guitar that has become the Jan Akkerman Personal II, made to a very high standard in Jakarta by Toien Bernadhi and commissioned by Brandin NL.

The guitars are then sent to The Netherlands, where the hardware and electronics are fitted by a dedicated team including Herwegh, Pierre Van Wanrooij and Richard Keiser. Today, *Guitar & Bass* is fortunate enough to get a close-up look at both of these fine guitars.

Gibson Les Paul Personal

The Les Paul Personal was introduced in late 1969, and the first prototype had a regular Les Paul sized body. It had the small Fretless Wonder frets that were not popular, but they were soon replaced with jumbo fretwire for ease of playing. The production model's body was built from clear grain Honduran mahogany with a centre cross-band and was 18.25 inches long, 14 inches wide and two inches thick. It had a three-piece laminate mahogany neck that was quarter sawn for added strength. With a dark walnut finish, ebony fingerboard and mother of pearl block inlays, the model also had gold-plated deluxe sealed metal tuners that were superior to the plastic Kluson button type. At that time, the Personals cost more than a Les Paul Custom and were quite heavy, weighing in between 8.5–12lbs. The total number shipped was only 146 between 1969 and the middle of 1971.

Peter brings out a case that is slightly larger than you would expect for the average Les Paul, and when I open the lid, Jan's beautiful guitar in two-tone dark burst is mesmerising. What strikes me is the shape: it has a more rounded lower horn than a Standard or Custom and is slightly wider across the body. It's in good condition, and where the XLR microphone socket at the top edge of the guitar would have been, there's a filled repair with a well-matched piece of mahogany. According to luthier Wim Heins, who has worked on this guitar, it has been re-topped, re-necked, the headstock has been broken off several times and the electronics have been replaced. A new two-piece flame maple top has been put on and it has a real three-dimensional look. The weight is >

10.3lbs and it has three humbucking pickups. In early 1973, Paul Hamer of Hamer Guitars was asked to take the low-impedance pickups out and replace them with humbuckers. A wrapover bridge was fitted and the two tone and two volume controls were positioned slightly closer together than normal to facilitate Jan's technique of bowing – using his little finger to swell the note. With the body of the guitar being wider and larger, it had more sustain than Jan's black Les Paul Custom, even though it was lighter in weight.

Akkerman acquired this guitar in New York when he was recording his solo album, *Tabernacle*, in 1973. Interestingly, it was Les Paul's son Gene who was behind the desk on the session – a well-known producer and engineer who worked with many major-name acts. The guitar was also used in Focus on the album *Hamburger Concerto*. After 1975, it seems the guitar was left with guitar builder Anno Galema for almost 20 years. Akkerman later remembered where the guitar was and drove to collect it. On arrival, it was in a poor state, totally stripped and cracked and had lost its binding. Heins restored it over a period of five months – the damaged maple top was taken off again and replaced with a new one, and three humbuckers were fitted.

Heins also made a beautiful birdseye maple guitar for Akkerman that was very wide with a single cutaway and was reminiscent of Jan's signature Framus guitar from 1974. A piezo-type bridge was fitted, along with two humbuckers. This guitar was also in the factory when *G&B* visited, and a joy to see.

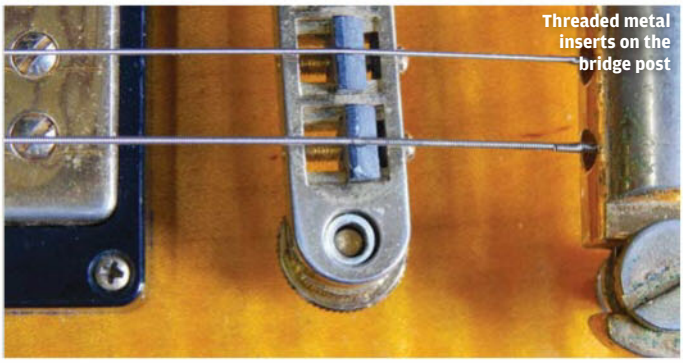
Neck

Originally, the neck would have been a three-piece mahogany construction for added strength, with a volute at the back. This neck is one-piece mahogany with a volute and has an ebony fingerboard, possibly the original one. The block inlays on the guitar are finely cut and just after the 22nd fret there is a small angled piece of binding with a half fret fitted. On the 17th fret, next to the fretwire, is a small ebony insert – ebony can chip very easily when pulling out old frets. This neck was made by Heins – even the Gibson logo was added by him – but the inlay work is by Fred Dons.

The binding has been replaced and the frets are jumbo-sized, measuring 2.62mm. The fretwire run to the edge of the 'board and sits atop the binding. This is something that Gibson now does on all of its new guitars except for vintage reissues. The neck is a very comfortable shape that's quite slim at the back and measures 53.4mm across the heel.

The Gibson Les Paul Personal, resplendant in its case

The tailpiece angle is low on the treble side



Threaded metal inserts on the bridge post

Nut

The bone nut measures 42.43mm, has a small gap on the treble side and has been cut very well and low at the first fret, but the wound strings sit a little lower than they should, which reflects Jan's playing style. The wide spectrum of his technique, especially the incredibly rhythmic parts he plays with his thumb, could possibly result in the strings popping out of the nut slots if they sat higher up.

Machineheads

Over the years, there have been some changes here: originally, they would have been deluxe sealed gears, but after Jan got hold of the guitar, Grover Imperial Stairstep machineheads were fitted, possibly taken from a Gretsch. However, the guitar today has generic, gold-plated locking machineheads. What is interesting is that the machinehead buttons are not part of these locking tuners, and I can see the same buttons (called Butter Beans) fitted on his Gretsch White Falcon; later, they also appeared on his Les Paul Custom with two Gretsch pickups, leading us to wonder if they're the same ones. They feel great and your thumb fits them perfectly; I prefer this mishmash to the stock Grover types! Jan also uses 8-gauge strings.

Across the top of the headstock, it measures 86.56mm and the thickness from around the bottom E machinehead area is 16.02mm, tapering to 14.05mm at the D-string machinehead. Heins says that the original split diamond headstock that was broken had the serial number 906011. This means that what's left of the original guitar could date from either late-1969 or 1970.

Bridge

The bridge is a non-original, Nashville-style unit. It's the type that Gibson used from 1974, but what is curious about it is the threaded metal inserts that screw over the bridge posts; the bridge is then squeezed over the top, sitting on two thumb wheels for a secure fit; this will help in tone transfer. The bridge saddles are made of graphite for less friction and are very smooth from wear and tear. The bridge width is 13.89mm and the length is 85.45mm. The tailpiece is angled down on the treble side, resulting in the top E string touching the back edge of the bridge; this is not good, as the increased tension could make the string more prone to breakages. This has been done deliberately for reasons of feel and tension, I'm sure, but lifting the tailpiece up just a little would help avoid any problems.

Control cavity

The controls sit inside metal foil that completely shields the inside, as well as the cover that is labelled "Wim Heins April 1998", which I remove. There is just one Gibson-stamped volume pot and CTS volume and two tone controls, but the lower bridge tone control is not connected to anything. The mini toggle switch delivers a variety of sounds, in conjunction with the main Switchcraft toggle switch, so really it simply has a master tone control and two volumes. The pot code that I can see reads 'EPO86 500 1017 CTS', which tells me this pot was manufactured in the 17th week of 2010.

You will see pictures of this guitar in its many guises, but to summarise, in 1998 it had cream pickup surrounds and a Stetsbar vibrato; then, in May 2000, it was seen with three black surrounds and still had the split diamond headstock, bonnet knobs, tune-o-matic bridge and tailpiece. In 2005, we saw it with a mini toggle switch on the upper tone control, and the headstock was plain. Around 2010, Dons added a mother of pearl inlay to the headstock, which depicts Akkerman cradling an archtop (see above).

Mother of pearl inlay by Fred Dons

The pancake construction from the side

The bottom E string sits low in the nut slot

"As I plug the guitar into a Kustom combo amp, I am impressed with how well balanced it is"

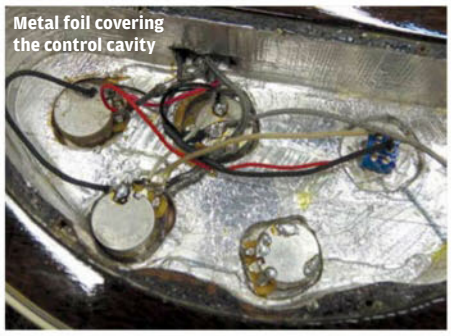
Pickups

The neck pickup is a Gibson '57 reissue and its DC resistance measures 7.86k ohms. These pickups were intended to be closer to Seth Lover's original specifications and the hand-winding process aims to replicate the inconsistencies that are such an important part of the character of the originals. These units utilise alnico II magnets and, unlike original PAFs, are wax potted in order to minimise microphonic squeal. Two-conductor braided wiring was used on the originals – as can also be seen in this case. The middle pickup has a PAF sticker on the bottom plate and handwriting in black marker pen that says 'mid historic PP'. It has a DC resistance of 8.12k ohms.

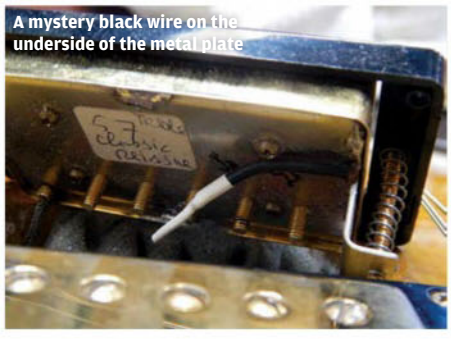
Lifting out the bridge pickup reveals a white sticker with '57 Treble Classic Reissue' written on it. There's a black wire coming from the underside of the pickup with a white insulating cover. It's most likely a ground wire, as the braided pickup wire emerging from the other end of the unit leads off into the control cavity. A small piece of foam is situated underneath the pickup; this could be there either to stop movement or to ensure that the pickup sits parallel to the strings. DC resistance is 8.26k ohms. The routing for the pickups is neat, but doesn't replicate the typical dimensions and shape used by Gibson. The front pickup surround is stamped 'M69' and looks to be an original from Kalamazoo, but the middle and bridge surrounds do not – the edges of the plastic are serrated rather than smooth, indicating that they are from a different supplier. The toggle switch surround is gold plated, as is the switch tip, which ties in with the premium status of the Les Paul Personal in the Gibson catalogue.

Sound

As I walk across the workshop to plug the guitar into a Kustom combo, I am impressed with how well balanced it is. The extra size >


Metal foil covering the control cavity

The volume control has been removed from the cavity


A mystery black wire on the underside of the metal plate

The middle pickup is marked 'Mid historic pp'

The '57 Reissue pickup is closer to Seth Lover's original design

distributes the weight well between body and neck. Starting with the front pickup with mini toggle in the middle position and the main toggle switch up, there's a great tone with not too much of the kind of bass boom you often get from neck humbuckers. The tone control takes out all the treble with a smooth taper that has lots of interesting possibilities when used in conjunction with the mini toggle. When the mini toggle is in the up position, the middle pickup is on and when the main toggle switch is in the mid position, front and bridge are on together – a kind of out-of-phase sound that's perfect for some of Akkerman's rhythm parts. Flipping the mini toggle to the down position switches all three humbuckers on; the up position on the mini toggle changes nothing. The lower volume control also blends the coils when rolled back slightly but the lower, bridge tone control isn't connected to anything.

The bridge pickup has great bite with the main toggle switch down and the mini toggle in the middle position, and there is good balance across the strings, but when the mini toggle is in the down position, the bridge and middle pickups are on. Again, the mini toggle in the up position does nothing. There is an incredible variety of tones available here. A ceramic capacitor is connected to the bridge volume control and is difficult to see, as there is a lot of wire around it. I don't move this in case anything comes off, but it looks like it is .022 value, a cap commonly used with humbuckers.

I notice a fault on the bridge volume control and mention this to Peter, who replaces it when I move on to the Brandin guitar later. That said, one of the things that stands out for me is that there is little drop in volume: it does not lose the character of these pickups and it has an array of interesting sounds. This guitar has undergone many changes over the years, with Akkerman in continual pursuit of great tone, but following much experimentation he has, since late 2012, settled on this combination of hardware.

Brandin Jan Akkerman Personal II

It is clear from first impressions that the Brandin JA Personal II has taken inspiration from some of the features of both the original Les Paul Personal and the Les Paul Custom that Akkerman used extensively. Indeed, Akkerman himself has played a significant role the development, adjustment, design and redesign process behind this instrument.

The Steff Pierre-designed humbucker on the Brandin model is based on both the classic PAF and the humbuckers that Jan has in his guitars. The instrument I'm handed is actually the prototype: the colour is Violin Sunburst and is similar in appearance to the Gibson Personal guitar. There are also black and white models.

The front pickup is a TV Jones Classic Filter'Tron, but the Steffsen humbucker is missing from the bridge. You cannot fail to be impressed with the look of this guitar, even with most of the hardware missing. I particularly like the slanted cut at the end of the fingerboard.

Nut

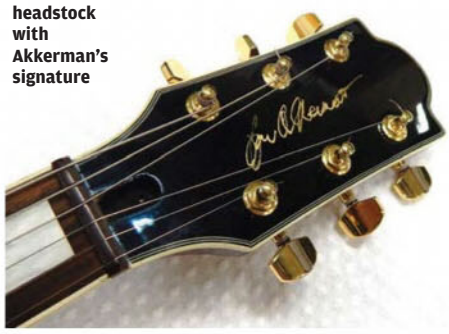
I take a measurement of 42.44mm (very close to the Gibson LP Personal's 42.43mm), which is quite impressive for a manufacturing tolerance. Peter tells me that he works on the frets when the guitars arrive in Holland for a nice, played-in feel. This prototype hasn't had that treatment yet, but they are still very well seated with no noticeable sharp edges. The other thing I do is tap each fret and listen for a certain tone: this determines whether the tang of the fret wire has made contact with the wood: in this case, they all have. The nut is a dark brown plastic, but is of the kind that is very hard and good for tone – not all synthetic nuts have the same density, and some have a small molding channel underneath, which is far from ideal. This is a solid piece, hand cut with impeccably cut slots. The way that the back edge of the nut is slanted away from the take-off point of the strings gives greater freedom of movement to the strings and should reduce friction.

The headstock outline is very sympathetic to the aesthetics of the instrument. Sometimes a great-looking guitar can be let down by an unbalanced design, but not this one. It has a simple shape that's not too wide, with a distinctive arch on the top edge. Akkerman's signature adorns the face of the headstock in gold script.

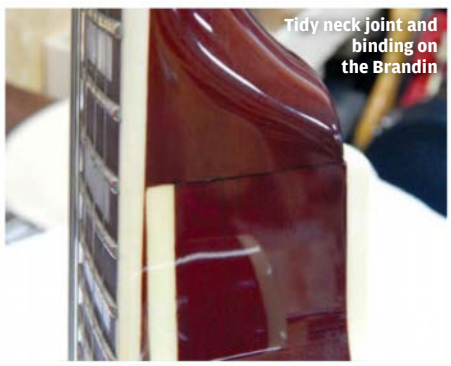
The tuners are gold-plated Kluson MS33G units, smooth in operation and, unlike the often default option of Grovers, do not add any unnecessary weight to the guitar. The headstock thickness is slightly thicker than the Gibson at 16.55mm, and the headstock pitch is 14.7 degrees. Gibson's original headstock pitch was 17 degrees but this changed to 14 degrees from 1965–1973, and the company introduced a volute around 1970

Prototypes of the Jan Akkerman Personal II in the Brandin factory

The maple cap before the finish is applied



Brandin headstock with Akkerman's signature



Tidy neck joint and binding on the Brandin

"The top of the guitar is finished in a beautiful tiger stripe maple with excellent book matching and is not a veneer"

for added strength, before reverting to 17 degrees with some models in the interest of vintage correctness later on.

Neck

The Personal II's neck is constructed from three pieces of mahogany, with a Macassar ebony fingerboard with 22 medium jumbo frets measuring 3mm, and the frets sit on the edge of the binding. The mother of pearl block inlays are very cleanly executed, with none of the usual filler around the edges. Macassar ebony is very smooth; the grain can vary from one board to the next, as can the colour, but the density will undoubtedly contribute to its resonance. It's similar in appearance to rosewood and very strong indeed. At the 12th fret, it measures 52mm in width – exactly the same as the Gibson.

Body

The body is mahogany with sound chambers that also help to keep the weight down to a very manageable 8.14lbs (which will change slightly when more hardware is added). The top of the guitar is finished in a beautiful tiger stripe maple with excellent book matching and is not a veneer. It is nice to see that the Brandin Akkerman guitars with this finish have consistent tops and no mismatching. The other thing I notice is that the lacquer is not overly thick; this can stifle resonance, especially when using polyurethane finishes. The thickness of the body is 47.58mm, and 43.2mm without binding, with a maximum width of 356mm.

Bridge

The bridge is made by Gotoh and now comes with Graph Tech saddles (early ones were metal). It's adjustable using two slotted posts that fit tightly into the bridge, which again is good for tone. The tailpiece is also machined to a high quality, with only slight movement in the securing studs.

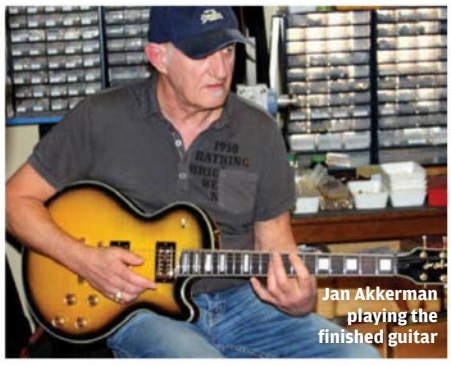
Pickups

The neck pickup is a TV Jones Classic, measuring 4-ohms, and is based on the '59 Filter'Tron version; it looks the part on this guitar. This idea obviously goes back to when Jan would've had a Gretsch pickup in this position on his black Gibson Custom in around 1973. TV Jones pickups attempt to recreate the sound of vintage Gretsch units >

The original prototype (right)

The 'work in progress' control cavity

The TV Jones Filter'Tron


Jan Akkerman playing the finished guitar

"The front TV Jones unit is very clear. It has amazing depth on the bass notes without being too muddy or losing articulation"

by using a period-correct manufacturing process and American-made materials that were used back in the 1950s and 60s. The hand-wound Steffsen PAF that would usually be in the bridge is a perfect match for the TV Jones pickup at around 7.5k ohms.

Control cavity

The four CTS volume and tone controls in this guitar date from the 48th week of 2011 and the 25th week of 2012. The orange drop capacitors are marked 'SBE225P 10V 73k 1226', which dates the guitar to the 26th week of 2012. The routing is very clean and tidy and, if the prototype is anything to go by, the solder joints are substantial, with quality wire having been used.

Sound

Across the factory, I take a finished Brandin Jan Akkerman guitar from its wall bracket and I notice the diagrams on the wall for its construction, dated 6/8/13. There have been various prototypes and tweaks along the way.

Plugging back into the Kustom amp I dial in a clean tone. The front TV Jones pickup is very clear in reproducing each note played and it has amazing depth on the bass notes without being too muddy or losing articulation when strings are played arpeggiated. Putting the toggle switch in the middle position brings in the Steffsen PAF, which gives a kind of out-of-phase sound without being too thin with an almost electro-acoustic ring to it: the TV Jones pickup, I'm sure, is responsible for this, along with the chambered construction. It is voiced beautifully with the bridge humbucker: I would use this combination more than any other twin-humbucker guitar because it doesn't sound too mushy, as sometimes happens with higher-output humbuckers.

The bridge pickup has a great attack – some humbuckers in the bridge can be a little too hot, which distorts even a clean setting on your amp; and when overdriven can sometimes obscure the character of your guitar altogether; this is not the case here. The strings just pick up very pleasing overtones without any of the nasties.

Summary

If this guitar didn't have Jan Akkerman's input in its design, I would still regard it as a very high-quality, versatile instrument that rewards you with long sustain in overdrive mode. Akkerman has a unique expression, and that's why he chose the hardware, pickups and electronics to reflect the need for a guitar that can produce a wide range of tones. It comes with a Brandin leather strap, extra strings, certificate of authenticity and Akkerman's album *Minor Details*.

G&B thanks Jan Akkerman, Peter Herwegh, Pierre Van Wanrooij and Richard Keiser for their help with this article.

Steve Clarke is an experienced guitar tech who can be contacted via famousfrets.com or by email at stacmusic@yahoo.co.uk.

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Six of the best

Getting a good live acoustic sound – using either a pickup, a mic or a combination of the two – is a tricky business. Here are six solutions

Fishman Rare Earth Single Coil Pickup

PRICE £109 **CONTACT** www.jhs.co.uk

British fingerstyle star Jon Gomm swears by the Rare Earth and it's a great choice for acoustic players looking for a soundhole pickup. The Fishman delivers a warm, well-voiced tone that'll ensure you shine through the mix in a band. It'll also handle effects well. With a neodymium magnet structure, newly designed mounting system and a low-current design that enables up to 300 hours of use between battery changes, it's easy to see why Gomm and many others rely on this pickup.

Seymour Duncan SA-6 Mag Mic

PRICE £200 **CONTACT** www.seymourduncan.com

The Mag Mic, as the name suggests, has the benefit of combining a hum-cancelling magnetic Stack pickup with an omni-directional condenser mic. This allows you to dial in some high-end definition from the mic to balance the full-bodied warmth from the pickup. You get onboard master volume and mic blend controls, and the pickup runs off a nine-volt-battery. It's used by Weissenborn players such as Ben Harper, David Lindley and Xavier Rudd, too.

The Fishman delivers a warm, well-voiced tone that'll ensure you shine through the mix if you're playing with a band. It'll also handle effects well

Takamine Tri-Ax 2

PRICE £229 **CONTACT** www.takamine.com

Takamine describes the Tri-Ax 2 as "the most advanced and intelligent design in soundhole mounted pickups". It has a built-in class A preamp and a dual-coil design that incorporates LR Baggs' Tri-Axial Dynamic Technology, which is designed to pick up both string and body vibrations. It fits guitars with a soundhole larger than 3.5 inches and is highly resistant to feedback, noise and hum, with adjustable pole pieces and a passive/active switch, as well as a claimed battery life of a whopping 1,000 hours from a single CR2032 coin cell.

LR Baggs M1 Soundhole Pickup

PRICE £149 **CONTACT** www.lrbaggs.com

The M1 is a patented humbucking pickup with a lower coil that contributes additional high frequencies, making for a more rounded overall sound. LR Baggs recommends the pickup for players seeking "big acoustic tone with high feedback resistance". There are active and passive options, both with adjustable pole pieces, built-in gold plated 1/8-inch jack, a pre-wired strapjack harness and, in the case of the active version, 1,000 hours' battery life from a single three-volt lithium coin cell.

DiMarzio DP230 The Angel

PRICE £139 **CONTACT** www.dimarzio.com

"It has always been one of our goals to create a magnetic pickup that reproduces the exact sound of an acoustic guitar," says DiMarzio of The Angel, which offers the excellent definition that a magnetic pickup provides due to its close proximity to the strings, along with an improved, more natural sound. With a Rare Earth magnet on board, the DiMarzio will fit any acoustic guitar with a soundhole 89mm or larger.

Shadow SH's Sonic Doubleplay combines a soundhole preamp and an active NanoMag pickup at the end of the fingerboard

Shadow SH Sonic Doubleplay

PRICE £169 **CONTACT** www.shadow-electronics.com

Shadow SH's Sonic Doubleplay combines a soundhole preamp and an active NanoMag pickup at the end of the fingerboard. The sonic preamp packs a two-band EQ, feedback-combating phase invert switch and volume control into its small frame, running on a pair of three-volt cell batteries. Shadow SH claims a battery life of 25 hours and it's a lightweight, easy-to-install solution that enables you to blend the preamp and NanoMag signals to taste. What's not to like?

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This barely-played 50s Strat has the unblemished appearance of a modern guitar. However, as **HUW PRICE** finds, it plays and sounds like a vintage dream...

Originally given to The Music Guild in California by Fender as a promotional item, this Stratocaster was sold to its original owner for $331.71 in March 1956 and was virtually unplayed for the next 40 years. Besides a touch of wear on the edges of the neck and middle pickup covers, 'as new' would not be an unreasonable description. Opening the case, complete with original candy, really does feel like a spine-tingling, 'time capsule' moment.

The neck is dated January '56, while the one-piece body has a label in the control cavity that's hand-signed 'Gloria' and dated Valentine's Day 1956. Lifting the scratchplate also reveals a hand-altered wire channel and factory-fresh wiring with all the original parts in situ and the spring claw grounded to the volume pot.

The body has a label that's hand-signed 'Gloria' and dated Valentine's Day 1956

While researching early Strats for a '54 replica project, I learned that Fender tried three types of two-tone sunburst while it was figuring out the best method. This appears to be version two, with a yellow-stained centre section transitioning to dark brown edges.

Until 1956, Fender didn't cut and polish after the lacquer had cured. Instead, the bodies were sanded once sufficient coats had been applied and a few thin clear coats were then sprayed on top to bring up the gloss. It's clear this body was never polished out and the outer edges of the burst are crude with stray brown blobs in the yellow. To be honest, a gifted amateur would be able to match it.

In contrast, the neck does have a smooth gloss finish and the decal is in perfect condition. It looks as if a fine sealer coat was misted over the front of >

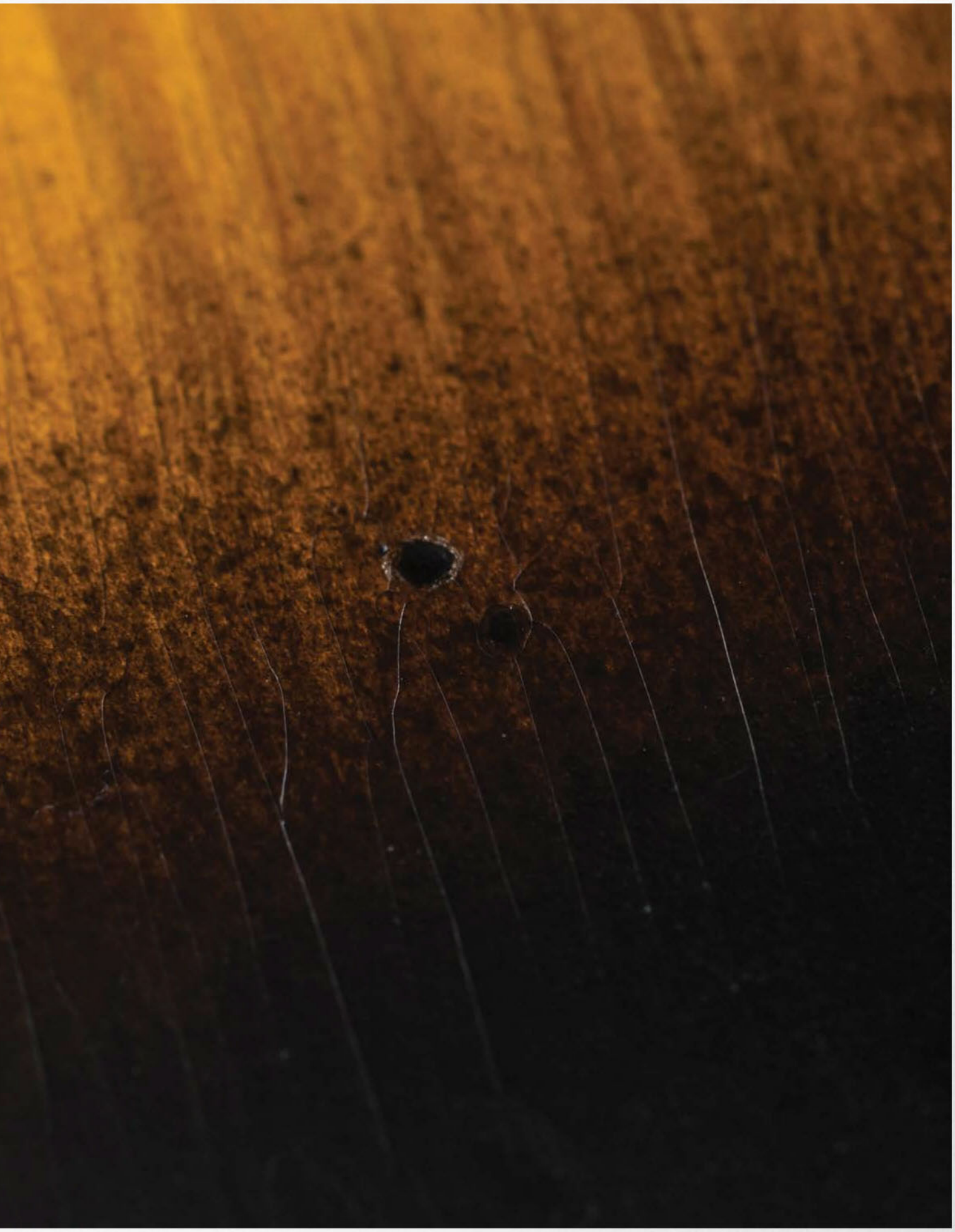
KEY FEATURES

'56 Fender Stratocaster

- **SCALE LENGTH** 650mm/25.5"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 51.5mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 21mm at first fret, 22mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 33mm at nut, 55.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.44Kg
- **FINISH** Two-tone burst
- **CONTACT** Vintage Guitar Boutique 0207 729 9186 **www.vintageguitarboutique.com**

Was this the way Fender guitars left the factory in 1956? The saddles have not been adjusted for intonation

It took Fender a while to settle on a method for spraying sunburst finishes and in early '56 the company was still figuring it out. You can see a very grainy transition between the light and dark areas and there are plenty of big brown spots where they shouldn't be



Top left **This label carries the signature of factory assembler Gloria Fuentes, dated Valentine's Day 1956**
Above left **This is the original factory nut and you can see how the string slots were 'V' shaped and very wide**
Above right **The logo is in superb shape, possibly because lacquer was misted over it at the factory. Note the long teardrop shape of the walnut plug**

the headstock after the decal had been applied. The side dots measure 3/32" in diameter and the profile is a chunky C with a hint of V nearer the headstock.

In use

It's often said that pristine vintage guitars are the ones nobody played because they weren't very good, and decades of playing are needed to make guitars really resonant. This unplayed '56 Stratocaster is in factory-fresh condition and it becomes clear that neither theory can be taken as gospel.

It's an odd sensation to play this Strat, because it feels and sounds both old and new

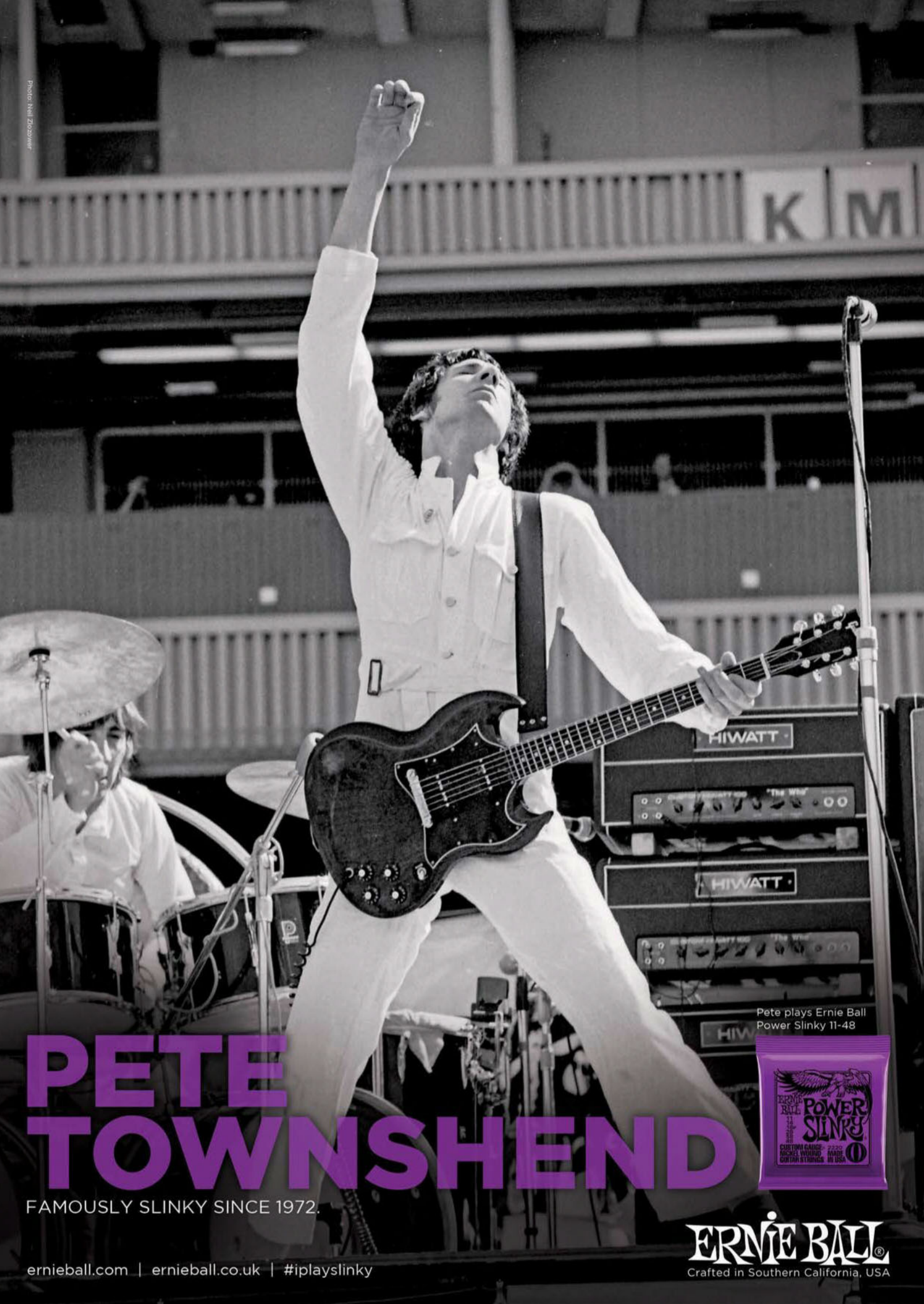
It's an odd sensation to play this Strat because it feels and sounds both old and new. Nothing on this guitar feels worn, so the no-line Kluson tuners operate smoothly and there's no slack. Every note rings out crisp and true, and to all intents and purposes it feels like playing a contemporary high-end Strat. However, the tiny frets and big neck do feel as if they're from another era.

The acoustic tone is very clear and airy. It has all the snappy brightness you would expect from an ash-bodied Strat with a big maple neck, but there's also plenty of woodiness and you can feel the whole body vibrating when you play chords. This is definitely a live one and it holds tuning superbly.

The intonation leaves something to be desired because it has probably never been adjusted. Although Fender went to the trouble of designing a bridge with six saddles that were individually adjustable for height and intonation, it seems it didn't do much in-house setup work.

Judging by the condition of the various screws, they haven't been touched by a screwdriver or allen key since this guitar left the factory. All six saddles line up like soldiers on parade and the string radius is almost flat. Maybe retailers were expected to perform setups according to customer preferences at the point of sale.

Even so, this guitar plays effortlessly with a set of modern 10-gauge strings and the bends feel really slinky. The action is extremely low but somehow it all works and there's no choke out or fret buzz. The neck tone control doesn't have much effect until it's rolled back past halfway. Below that, everything >



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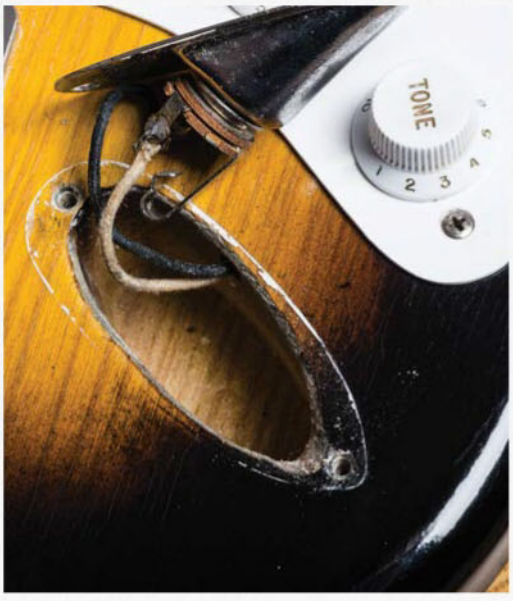

Top left **To avoid waste, no yellow stain was applied on the treble side of the pickup routs. Also check out the rough worm rout for the wires in the bridge pickup cavity**
Top right **The chamfered edges of the jacksocket hole show Gloria probably had to do some last-minute filing to get the plate to sit flat on the body**
Above left **Case candy doesn't get much better than this. In addition to the original vibrato arm and bridge cover, there's a pouch with original Fender celluloid picks, an unopened set of Fender strings, cable, polishing cloth and the original bill of sale**
Above right **You can gauge the depth of the neck by the way it transitions into the back of the headstock. Thinner vintage Fender necks would have wood carved away in the area behind the headstock to reduce neck depth at the first fret and there would be a curve rather than the straight line seen here**

happens so fast it's almost like a switch. The middle tone control will need some cleaning up before it works properly, but judging by the neck control the potentiometers may not have a modern audio taper.

The earliest Strats had alnico III magnets, but Fender soon changed over to alnico V. The sprangy high-frequency response of these pickups leaves me in little doubt that they are loaded with alnico V slugs and, by any standards, this is a bright and wiry sounding Strat. So much for the boot-eek pickup manufacturers' marketing spiel that 50s alnico V is equivalent to today's alnico III.

If you like glassy, crystal-clear Strats, this would be a dream guitar. Plugging in with your usual settings is unlikely to produce the best results because this '56 can sound a bit edgy and metallic through modern amps. Bear in mind this guitar was made in an era when guitarists often used heavier-gauge nickel strings with a wound G.

Each pickup sounds distinct and the range of tones is wider than usual

Fender amps from the early to mid 50s can sound quite dark in comparison to later amps. I tried this guitar through a '51 Deluxe and it sounded just right with the amp's tone control set around halfway. Normally, I play the amp with no treble roll-off, so it seems Fender guitars and amps of the same era really were designed to work together.

The skinny low frets aren't conducive to bluesy soloing, although the guitar's tone most certainly is. I found the '56 best for chord work because of its clarity and natural shimmer. Each pickup sounds distinct and the range of tones, from the woody neck to the snappy quack of the bridge, is wider than usual. Finding the in-between settings is a chore with the three-way switch, but it's worth the effort for the softer treble and transients.

At first glance, this Strat may appear and feel more like a mid-80s Japanese reissue than a genuine vintage instrument or even a Custom Shop concoction. However, the tone has way more depth, character and complexity. If you could live with the intonation, which isn't that bad, you could take this to a gig and be confident of a toneful and trouble-free night. It's one of the easiest-playing Strats I've ever encountered. In fact, it virtually plays itself.

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Above **Harry Seven with his vast and varied collection of amps**
Opposite page, top left **Trace Elliot 1010 bass stack combo**
Top right **1963 Bird Golden Eagles**
Middle left **Phoenix PHA1 120-watt head and Simms-Watts 60-100 Pro combo**
Bottom left **Orbit Double 12**
Bottom right **Roland VGA-7 combos**

Vintage PRIVATE COLLECTION

MAGNIFICENT SEVEN

Having recently profiled Harry Seven's synth-guitar gear in *G&B*, **Lars Mullen** gets the lowdown on his impressive collection of amps

You may have noticed from Harry Seven's guitar collection, which appeared in the January 2016 issue of *Guitar & Bass*, that he is also a fan of amps from the 60s onwards, as he explains: "I have to hold my hand up for having the inability to let a cool amp slip through my fingers and, like my guitars, I really don't mind if they look a little tired from years on the road, as long as they work.

"Some of that older amp technology was really interesting, especially the British solid-state models, but like most youngsters from my generation, we had to get by on what amps we could afford rather than what sounded great or looked cool.

"When I was a kid, our local music shop had a USA Kustom Tuck 'n' Roll head in bright blue and silver-flecked vinyl. I wanted that amp so badly, but it was way too expensive. I still love the quirkiness of vintage Kustom stuff, like my early-70s Kustom Sidewinder transistor combo fitted with a 15-inch speaker, rated at 75 watts.

"My first guitar and amp rig, though, was a K-32 S type, which is long gone, and an FAL Super Minstrel amp, which I still have. FAL (Futuristic Aids Limited Leeds) was a cheap and nasty brand, but it was kind of kitsch.

"It all took a new direction when I was in a punk band in '79. I was hoping for a really cool sound with a newly purchased mid-60s Selmer Twin Zodiac 50, complete with magic eye tremolo and fake crocodile skin covering. I had a neat Antoria S type and a Dallas Rangemaster Treble Booster. It all sounded crap, far too much treble. So I destroyed the Rangemaster with a lump hammer, sold the amp for £25 and the guitar for £20. Isn't hindsight wonderful?"

"My first guitar and amp rig was a K-32 S type and an FAL Super Minstrel amp, which I still have"

Thanks to Carlsbro amplification, Harry seemed to calm down a little, as he adds: "Pretty soon after that, a Carlsbro 50 Top head, a 60s Marshall 4x12 and a Jedson LP type worked really well for me, and I've since retread the boards by adding a few combos, like a 70s Carlsbro 1X12 60 TCR, a Stingray Super 100-watt 2x12 and a Stingray MultiChorus, which were the backdrop to my formative years.

"I've also owned several Laney amps over the years. At the moment, I have a 100-watt Laney Pro-Tube Lead head from '84, a Pro-Linebacker Twin >

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combo and this little cool-sounding 15-watt LC16 solid-state combo, which has a really funky tremolo.

"I also have fond memories of first encountering the hybrid Phoenix PHA1 120-watt head, which had a valve preamp coupled with a solid-state ILP output stage. I used this amp in the early 80s, I didn't see another for years, then spotted this one here.

"Some of those early-80s solid-state amps were so innovative, like the Redmere Soloist built by PA:CE in Cambridge, which was available as a combo or separate head, and both built within a flightcase as standard. The literature boasted that channel one could cover Marshall, Fender and Vox tones. It had a range of built-in effects, including reverb, flanger, compressor, chorus and noise gate, operated by touch-sensitive switches and a footswitch with a huge programmable switch matrix system. A great-looking amp that failed to set the world alight. I have two, a combo and a standalone head, from '80.

"PA:CE also produced the Intermusic line of heads and combos in the early 80s and, like the Redmere Soloist, always arrived pre-flightcased. They have a great chunky sounding built-in phaser.

"Whilst many brands use Fender as a benchmark, few have come as close as the Traynor YGL-3 Mark 3 2x12 combo, which was the company's answer to the Twin Reverb, and sounds amazing with EL34s in the power stage, renowned for high-quality transformers and tons of headroom."

From Harry's huge vinyl collection, he shows us some cool covers decorated with transistor amps from the 70s and 80s.

"There were so many," he says, "like HH, who also had a hand in producing innovative British-made transistor amps from that era. Most people mention Marc Bolan in the same breath as HH in terms of influences, but for me it was the Buzzcocks – just look at the front cover of *Singles Going Steady*. You've got to love that illuminated front panel thing happening that they were noted for. I have several models, from the 70s through to later 80s stuff, including an IC-100, a Super Sixty, a Studio-100, several VS Musicians, IC-100 and a Studio Fifty, all of which I've picked up from car boot sales and charity shops for under £30.

"I think my Burman Pro 502 2x12 valve combo, again British-built, this time in Newcastle, dates from the late 70s. It's in great condition and definitely a keeper. These amps were built like tanks throughout and still sound fantastic today loaded with ECC81, ECC83 and KT77 valves.

"Some of those early-80s solid-state amps were so innovative, like the Redmere Soloist"

"Bird was another manufacturer of unusual British amplifiers built by Sydney S Bird and Sons of Poole, Dorset in the early 60s. I have two at the moment, a Golden Eagle 2/15 and a Golden Eagle 4/25, both from '63, that need some TLC. They're still only relatively appreciated, but loved by collectors for their charm and peculiar design quirks, like the reverb system which included cartridges from record players.

"It's a shame Bird was overshadowed by the more popular brands at the time, the likes of Marshall and Vox for example, while Burns have become a British icon with guitars and amps. You have >

Above left **Dan Armstrong Dan 2 60-watt combo**
Above right **A selection of Peavey combos from Harry's collection**
Opposite page, top left **Mini Doobie G-15 combo, Davoli Tempest and Dallas-Arbiter Slider**
Bottom left **Assortment of HH amps**
Middle right **Vermona MV-3 head**
Bottom right **Intermusic head and combo, Carlsbro Stingray bass head and Carlsbro Marlin PA head**

Above left **Redmere Soloists, built by PA:CE**
Above right **Carlsbro 1X12 60 TCR (top) and Stingray Super 100-watt 2x12**

to love Jim Burns – the man who never gave up. 'England's answer to Leo Fender', so the quote goes. Apart from some great guitars, you have a diverse range of amplifiers, and I love the variants on the mid-60s Orbit transistor combos, which include the Orbit Three and Orbit Double 12, of which I have several. Allegedly despised by amp techs, I just love the aesthetic simplicity of the front of these combos. Admittedly, they don't always sound that great, but they look damn cool."

Next, Harry takes us on a tour deep into Europe for some unusual amplifiers. He says: "During the 60s, the Italians had a hand in producing solid-state amps with a hint of mojo, like the Davoli Tempest 25 and Krundaal Storm combo, which has a built-in sustain that's really cool for slide guitar. Germany also produced some fine amps that are now very collectable, like my late-60s compact, twin-channel 12-watt Vermona MV3 head, allegedly designed by the Design Institute of Musical Instruments in Dresden, Germany. I've had a dust around the EF86, ECC83 and EL84 valves. I've yet to get round to powering it up, but I understand it's in full working order.

"Another from the mid-70s is my Dallas-Arbiter Slider. I've always thought these were just great-looking amps with their slide controls. The history of Dallas-Arbiter is well documented, but these are such simple, understated cabinet designs, I just can't resist them.

"I have a thing about slide controls, they seem to depict an era, as seen on my tired-looking 70s Dan Armstrong Dan 2, 60-watt combo. These amps featured all solid-state pre-amps with valve output stages. I love the way the two speakers are more or less upright and the cab has a side handle. The spec highlights the fact that the back of the cab is removable for reducing bass response.

"As I recall, my 60-watt valve, Sound City 2x12 Concord bass combo, produced by Dallas-Arbiter in the late 60s, was also sold under the Hayman name. I bought it off a guy and used it the same night at a gig as a guitar amp. He did warn me about the slide controls and I got in a mess a couple of times, as they work in reverse – slide up to turn down and slide down to turn up. They're quirky enough to pique my interest and a compact bass combo for the time, unlike my Trace Elliot 1010 bass stack combo I saw advertised in *Beat Instrumental* around '79. I wasn't playing bass and had no reason to own one, but I thought as a combo they looked awesome. With a 250-watt head and the 8x10 speaker format in one cab, it must be one of the biggest combos produced. It's taken me 30 years to find one.

"Another from the mid-70s is my Dallas-Arbiter Slider. I've always thought these were great-looking amps"

"I love the Roland VGA-7 combos, which were essentially Roland's VG COSM technology in a 2x12, programmable stereo format. They're getting a bit long in the tooth now, but loud, versatile and ticked all the boxes on my 'slightly quirky and a bit unloved' list, so I felt it was rude not to acquire them. I think they were over £1,000 each when new around 2001, but I picked the pair up for £150 recently, and they sound cool with so many of my guitars from that period, which along with the amps are frequently expanding my guitar collection..."

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Blackstar S1-45 2x12 45W combo. Two channels, four modes, all footswitchable. Comes complete with four-way footswitch & Roqsolid heavy-duty cover. Stunning sounds, home use only. £600. Call Pete on 07982 912304

Cort M600, very good condition, Tone Pros bridge, lovely colour. £150. Contact 07952 41811 or des.murdock@btinternet.com. Cumbria

Epiphone 12-string Bard Deluxe, solid rosewood, early 1970. Eko Rio Bravo six-string, early 1970, open for sensible offers. Phone 01792 581342 for details. Swansea

Farida A62-CE Electro-acoustic guitar, Fishman electrics with Presys blend onboard preamp, solid cedar top and solid mahogony back, Farida hardcase, mint condition. £450 ono. Tel Graham, 0161 973 8406. South Manchester

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1997 Fender Jimi Hendrix Tribute Stratocaster (Woodstock model), unmodified, pro set-up, case, vgc, £1,500. For full details and hi-res photos call 01943 465357

Fender Hot Rod Deville 60w 2x12 combo flightcased amp, was revalved seven years ago and unused since, buyer to collect £575 ovno. Contact Paul, 07779 672436

Gibson 57 Black Beauty, barely used. 1999 re-isssue with Bigsby tremolo, original pickups and hardcase, £2,500 ono. 07445 911879. Carmarthenshire

Gibson ES-175D Sunburst, 1979, one owner, tags, case, good condition. £1,995. 07593 398272 or email roger_gill@btinternet.com. West Mids

Gibson ES-339 Custom Shop, 2010. Antique Red, 50s neck, cream binding, home use only, mint condition, Gibson Custom Shop hardcase. Pictures available. £1,350. Call 07958 339500 or email paulc8@hotmail.com (Worthing)

Gibson Les Paul Deluxe Goldtop 1972, one owner. Tags, case. DiMarzio pickups and TP6 tailpiece included in price. Good condition, £1,995. 07593 398272 or email roger_gill@btinternet.com. West Midlands

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PERSONNEL

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All about... Boosts

Since British players began trying to replicate US amp sounds in the 60s, boosting volume or frequency without unduly colouring tone has been an ongoing quest. **HUW PRICE** explains...

When discussing landmark guitar tones, important factors are often overlooked. For instance, nobody ever seems to consider the ambience of the room in which the amp was placed, or indeed the microphone that was used to capture the sound. Most surprising is the way treble boosters have been written out of the history books.

Treble boosters were widely used by many of the big-name players during the 1960s and 1970s. Eric Clapton's sound on John Mayall's 'Beano' album was a game changer, but his Dallas Rangemaster treble booster was almost as crucial as the Les Paul and Marshall combo.

Then came Marc Bolan, Rory Gallagher, Ritchie Blackmore and Tony Iommi. Brian May has never stopped using treble boosters with his AC30s. He has been associated with various models, but one thing is certain – without a treble booster even Brian May wouldn't sound like Brian May.

The Klon Centaur is for many guitarists the holy grail of boost pedals. It has long been out of production, but has spawned many clones, and second-hand prices remain eye-wateringly high

Treble boosters were fundamental to the evolution of blues-rock and classic metal tones

Bluesy boosts

It's perhaps no coincidence that these famous players originated from our side of the Atlantic and they all used British amplifiers.

By the mid 1960s, the brownface and blackface Fender amps that American players were using were plenty bright enough. In contrast, early British guitar amps sounded comparatively dark – especially pre-top boost Vox amps.

Consequently, British players would struggle to replicate the sounds they were hearing on American recordings without buying a very expensive Fender amp. Treble boosters, however, offered a convenient and affordable solution.

These treble boosters were built into enclosures designed to sit on top of amps, but they were still connected between the guitar output and the amp input. Had their only effect been to make British amps sound a tad brighter, they would have become obsolete once amp manufacturers figured out how to extend treble response.

Treble boosters lingered on because guitarists discovered they could be used to push the front ends of valve amps into cutting but creamy valve overdrive and sweet, singing sustain. As such, treble boosters were fundamental to the evolution of blues-rock and classic metal tones.

Classic treble boosts

There were relatively few guitar effects manufacturers during the mid-to-late 1960s, so there weren't many treble boosters to choose from. John Hornby Skewes offered one to complement and brighten up its Zonk Machine fuzzbox and Ritchie Blackmore used it. Meanwhile Orange, Winston and Vox made them, too, but they're somewhat obscure.

Ultimately, the Dallas Rangemaster overshadows them all, so what made it so special?

The Rangemaster features a single OC44 germanium transistor, and the circuit is configured to provide a high-pass filter as well as a boost of up to 24dB. The boost isn't applied evenly across the frequency range, so if you play a low E the fundamental frequency remains more or less at unity gain. As you play higher up the neck, the treble booster effect becomes more pronounced, and it will be at its most extreme when you're soloing in the higher registers.

In addition, the way the germanium transistor was biased is crucial to the operation of the Rangemaster circuit. Biased near to its cut-off, the transistor starts to compress the signal more on one side of the waveform than the other. This adds gentle asymmetric overdrive that turns into distortion as higher signal levels push the transistor into full cut-off.

The way the Rangemaster interfaces with the grid of an amp's first preamp valve also differs from a regular guitar output. The Rangemaster's

output impedance is much lower and never goes above the 10k value of the output potentiometer. It's thought that this causes the valve to overdrive more smoothly.

Fall from favour

By the early 1980s, treble boosters were becoming a thing of the past. Players could get heavy overdrive and sustain using active guitars with built-in preamps. Hot wound passive pickups such as Seymour Duncan's Quarter Pounder and Invader, and the DiMarzio Super Distortion replaced plenty of vintage-style pickups.

Pedals were changing, too, with products such as the Ibanez Tube Screamer, DOD 250 and Boss OD-2 simulating a more valve-like overdrive. Players discovered that the best results were often achieved when combining diode clipping and boost from these overdrive pedals with an already overdriving valve amp. The overdrive also added compression and focused the sound in the midrange by rolling off bass and treble. Amps with multiple gain stages, master volumes and powerful equalisation sections were generating far more overdrive and distortion than vintage-style designs.

Back to boosts

The goals of effortless overdrive and endless sustain had been achieved, but not everything was hunky dory on planet guitar. By the end of the 1980s, some players had grown jaded with the shredding scene, complaining that guitars and amps had ceased to be dynamic musical instruments. High-output guitars had become mere tone generators and the hot rodded amps were effectively tone shapers, but neither had much in the way of 'tone'.

Overwound pickups lacked clarity and 80s high-gain amps often had an artificial and processed quality. Even the overdrive pedals of the era tended to sound murky, and touch dynamics didn't even come into it. But how can smooth and sustaining overdrive be combined with dynamic range, wide open frequency range and tones that respond to playing touch and the volume knob on your guitar?

In addition to treble boosters, old-school players used tape echo and reel-to-reel tape recorder preamps as signal boosters. What would happen if you used a high-fidelity, low-noise preamp rather than a crude old treble boost? Thus the Klon Centaur came to pass and, forsooth, nothing was ever the same again.

The Klon employed a charge pump power supply that doubled the operating voltage for extended clean headroom. The signal was also split, with selected frequencies being sent into clean and overdrive paths to then be re-combined according to the user's preference.

The Klon is to contemporary boosts what the Rangemaster was to treble boosts

Perhaps the most discussed, dissected and mimicked of all effects pedals, the Klon is adored and belittled in equal measure, but the only things you can reasonably gripe about are their scarcity and the astronomic used prices. The Klon is to contemporary boosts what the Rangemaster was to treble boosts.

Quality clean boost pedals are now commonplace and popular examples include the Durham Sex Drive, Keeley Katana, Z Vex Super Hard On and Fulltone Fat Boost. These boosts can raise signal levels to the realms of high-output humbuckers without any resulting loss of dynamic response or clarity.

You may also find that guitars and amps feel more touch sensitive and guitar volume controls have a wider usable range. Treble boosters were generally left switched on and many contemporary players are doing the same with clean boosts to stack them with overdrive and fuzz pedals. Isn't it funny how some things eventually come full circle?

BUYER'S GUIDE

Vintage-inspired treble boosters will colour your tone, but in contemporary stompbox form you have the option to switch them off. Modern boosters generally focus on preserving or even enhancing the natural tone of your guitar and amp. Others replicate the circuitry of specific tape echo preamps for more specialised boost flavours, and boost features are often combined with reverb, tape echo and tremolo pedals. Also consider compressors and low-gain overdrives.

BRITISH PEDAL COMPANY RANGEMASTER £175

If you want authentic looks as well as tone, you'd be hard pressed to beat this one for attention to detail. It's wired point to point on tag strip with authentic-spec components. The downsides are the same as the originals – no footswitching and a fixed frequency range.

EHX LPB-1 £23

Mike Matthews introduced his first booster in 1968 in an attempt to produce a distortion-free sustainer. Originally, the LPB-1 was housed in a box with a protruding jack that plugged straight into a guitar. The current production version is billed as a spot-on reissue, but it's housed in a stompbox enclosure with a footswitch and a boost control.

JRAD ARCHER £129

The original Klon has long been out of production and there are now countless clones. The JRAD Archer probably has the best claim to being the closest thing to a Klon because it was developed in collaboration with Bill Finnegan, the man behind the originals. Most agree it gets very close indeed for less than a tenth of the price.

XOTIC EP BOOSTER £115

Jimmy Page, Eric Johnson and Eddie Van Halen famously used the Echoplex EP3 preamp as a boost, but few would want to carry a bulky tape echo to gigs these days. The EP Booster is a mini pedal containing an EP3-style preamp with internal boost frequency and EQ setting switches.

Chord Clinic

Following on from last month's initial lesson on slash chords, **ROD FOGG** introduces some new progressions with descending basslines that will bring a Motown feel to your chord sequences

This month, Chord Clinic carries on from last issue's introduction to slash chords. Slash chords have a note other than the root note in the bass. They are notated using a forward slash followed by the specified bass note. Try playing these examples by picking out the bass note first and then strumming the other notes of the chord, or put the pick down and play them fingerstyle, with your thumb on the bass note followed by an arpeggio on the upper strings.

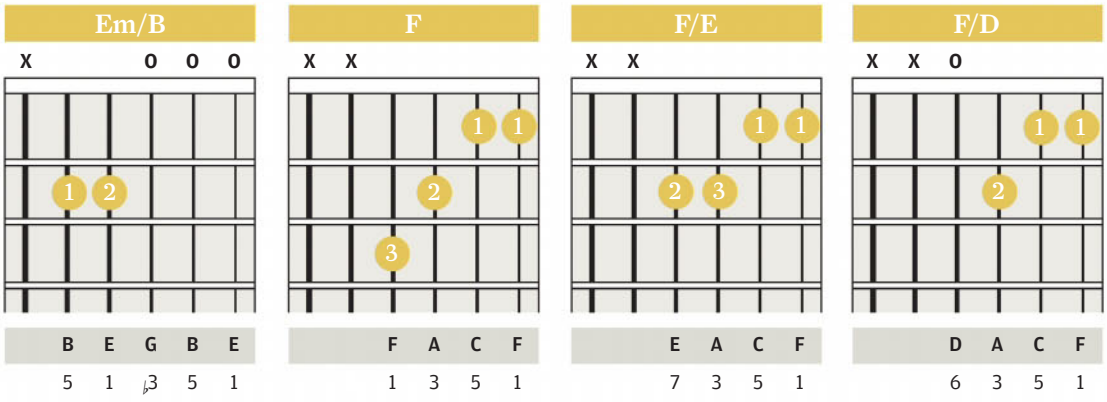
Figure 1 introduces Em/B, which means an E minor chord with B in the bass – we call it 'E minor with B'. Since B is the fifth of the E minor chord, this is known as a second inversion. The other chords in figure 1 are a four-note F major chord, followed by 'F with E' and 'F with D'. Technically speaking, F/E is Fmaj7 in third inversion and F/D is F6 in third inversion. F/D is also the same as Dm7, but slash chords are used because they reveal the underlying movement in this stepwise descending bassline.

To make sense of this progression, you have to start on C major, followed by a bar of Em/B, and then play two chords per bar – F, F/E, F/D and G. I'm assuming you can figure out your own C and G chords. Simplified, this chord sequence is just C, Em, F and G, and as such it has been used extensively in many kinds of music. I came across this sequence when listening to some Motown, and the slash chord bassline is an arrangement of these chords together with the sort of intelligent bassline that players such as James Jamerson came up with in the studio. Em/B works well as a passing chord between C and A minor, and in this case leads your ear to expect a bassline that moves by step to A, so that the F chord comes as something of a surprise.

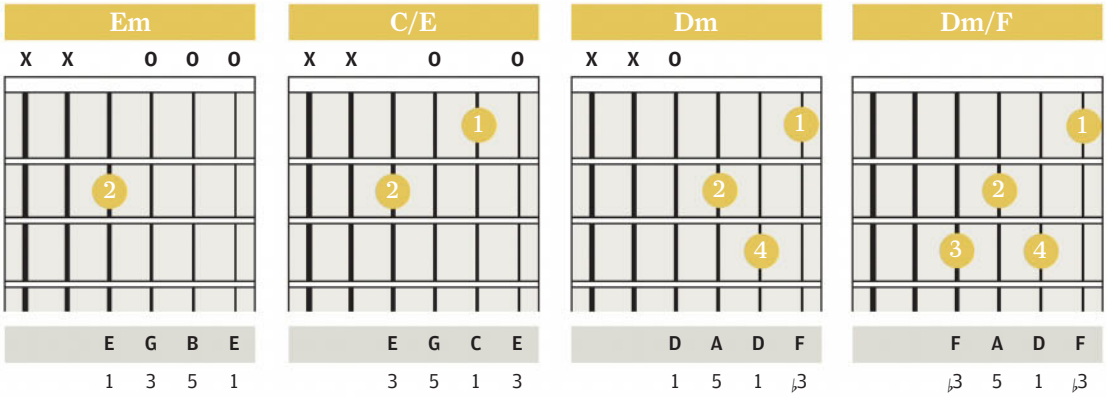
Moving on, C, Em/B, Am, G is a fairly common chord sequence. Figure 2 includes a tidy four-note E minor chord, which would allow you to divide up the E minor bar so that you have two beats of Em and two beats of Em/B. If you capo the third fret, you can play a similar sequence to Coldplay's *Fix You*.

Now let's mess around with this chord progression a little. The C/E chord allows you to experiment with getting rid of the E minor chord altogether – and you can also switch back to the Motown progression by putting in the descending bassline on the F

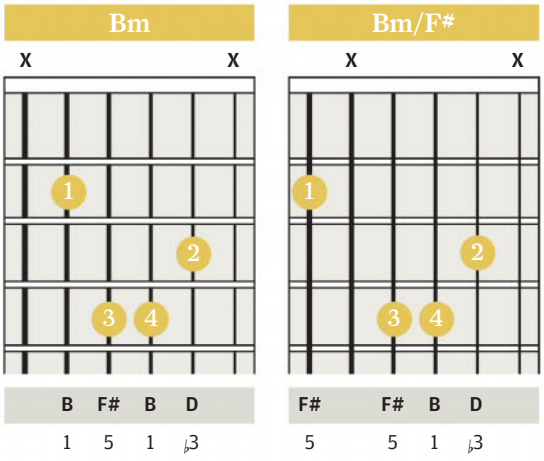
B in the bass (Fig 1)



In a Fix (Fig 2)



Key change (Fig 3)



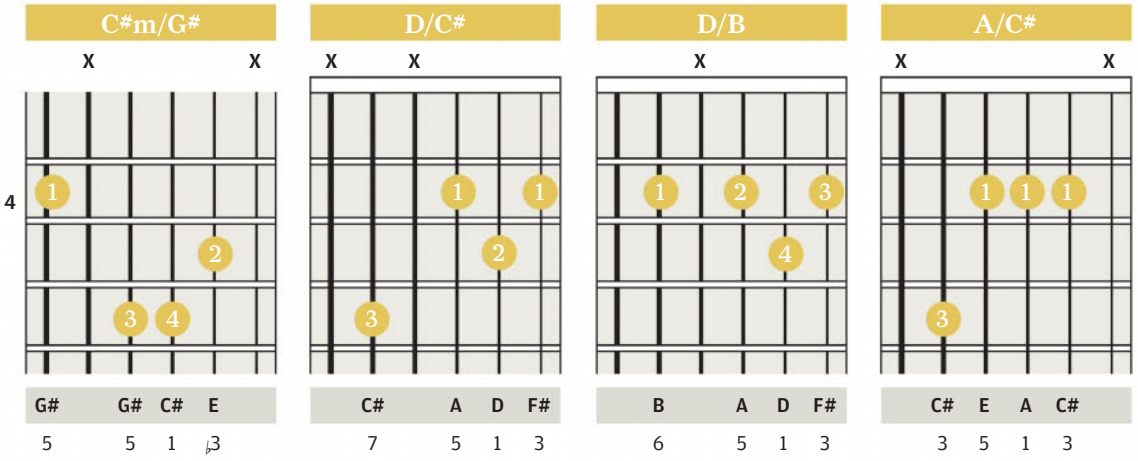
major chord from figure 1, ending on G as before. The C/E chord seems to lead nicely to the F major. Next, try substituting the Dm and Dm/F chords for F and F/E and then head straight to G. Slash chords can add colour, direction and occasionally surprise to the simplest chord sequences. They might not suit every style of music, but if you are a songwriter they are great for taking ordinary sequences and turning them into interesting and usable song sections.

Let's try exploring some new keys, starting with G major. Beginning on G, our Coldplay-inspired sequence would go to Bm and Bm/F# (figure 3). Use the tip and underneath of your index finger to mute the unwanted strings. From there on, the descending Motown bassline from C to C/B and C/A, ending on D, was covered in last month's instalment. Maybe we need a harder key!

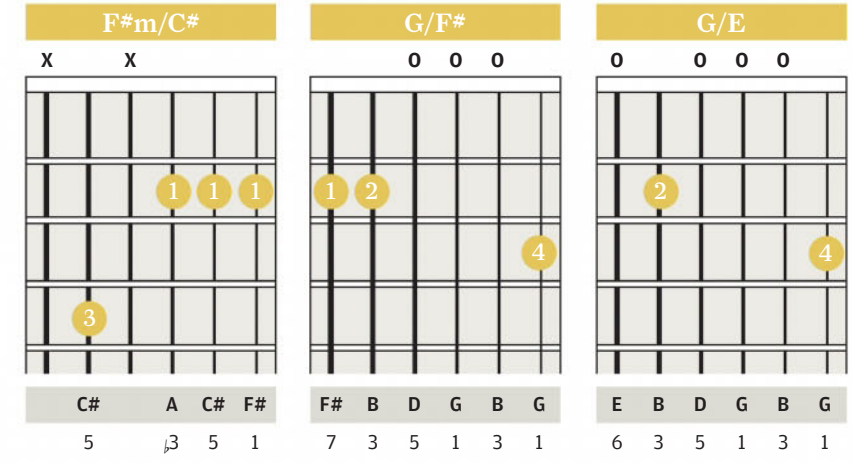
In figure 4 (over the page), the key is A major, and the Motown sequence begins on A and goes straight to C#m/G# with its bass note on the fourth fret. Then comes the descending bassline from D to D/C# and D/B. End on E, and repeat round and round, smiling broadly at the realisation that slash chords really do make a difference. Again, just as an experiment, try using the A/C# instead of C#m/G#. Interesting?

Next up is the key of D major (figure 5), so after D would come F#m/C#, and then G, G/F#, G/E before we arrive on A ready to go round again. The low voicing of G/F# can sound murky, so pick the bass note cleanly and then strum the sparkly notes at the top of the chord. Avoid picking the B on the fifth string so the chord is not too dense in the bass. Figure 6 gives you the option to use D/F# instead of F#m/C#, and includes some unusual high voicings of G major with a bassline moving down the D string. End on an A chord and around you go again. These slash chord sequences make *This Old Heart of Mine* feel pretty good.

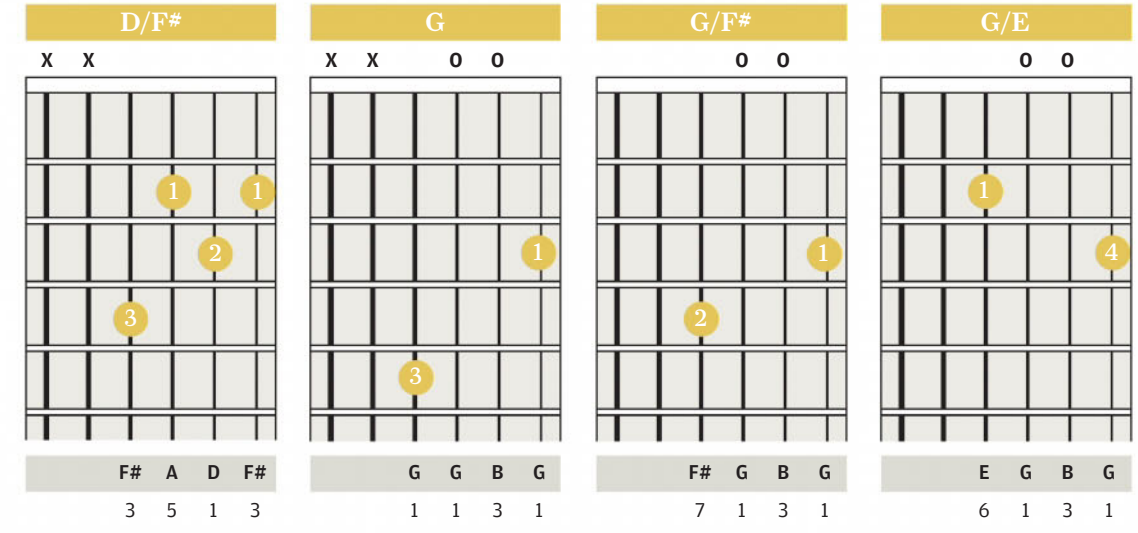
From A... (Fig 4)



... to D (Fig 5)



Three flavours of G (Fig 6)



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Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: a happy customer, a famous 335, a stolen Strat and your drive problems solved

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Workshop satisfaction

Hello *G&B* magazine, it's not often I feel moved to write to the publications I read, but I'm particularly grateful for the DIY Workshop article in your latest (Jan 2016) issue as it addressed a matter that has long occupied my interest and filled me with trepidation in equal measure. As the happy owner of both a Gibson 335 and an Epiphone Sheraton, I have long toyed with the idea of doing some upgrading of the electrics in both these instruments, given that there are certain tonal aspects I'd like to explore further with both these excellent guitars, but had so far been sure I would need to entrust the task to a qualified professional.

Given the wealth of online information on just about any subject imaginable, you would think I should have satisfied any need for information and instructions on how to go about this myself by now, and logically one could reasonably conclude that somewhere the perfect article does exist, yet your magazine addressed the subject with a completeness that I'd been unable to find anywhere else. Not only that, but the detailed and systematic manner with which Huw Price approached and presented the subject, particularly with the included images, has left me with a far better understanding of the steps involved, as well as a much clearer appreciation of the potential difficulties, in a way that leaves me feeling far more confident of being able to undertake the task myself – so thanks Huw and *Guitar & Bass*. That article was worth the price of the magazine on its own to me.

So, whilst I'm in congratulatory mood, please also allow me to offer my sincere appreciation for the consistently high quality of your magazine. You know you're doing something right when, despite already having a digital subscription, you still find yourself heading down to the local WH Smith around the first week of every month with that familiar tingle of anticipation to search out the latest print copy with the same enthusiasm as always. I can honestly say I'm not disappointed and find your mix of reviews, interviews and wealth of technical info compulsively readable. I also find the digital edition ideal for archiving old copies for future reference, so it's an easily justifiable spend in both directions.

Arthur Wilson (via email)

Guitar Letter of the Month

Cover star

A couple of months ago, I bought a nice old Gibson 335 from Cranes in Cardiff. We were recently shopping in Manchester and I called into WH Smith as usual. I was pleasantly surprised to see what appears to be my guitar on the cover of *G&B*'s *Archtop Bible*. Could you confirm this is my guitar from Cranes? It would be nice to know. I have bought the guitar to use in a blues band, but your nice photograph has made me a little reluctant to do this, as it would be a shame to get dings on it – still, it is a musical instrument, so I'll just have to be careful.

Jim (via email)

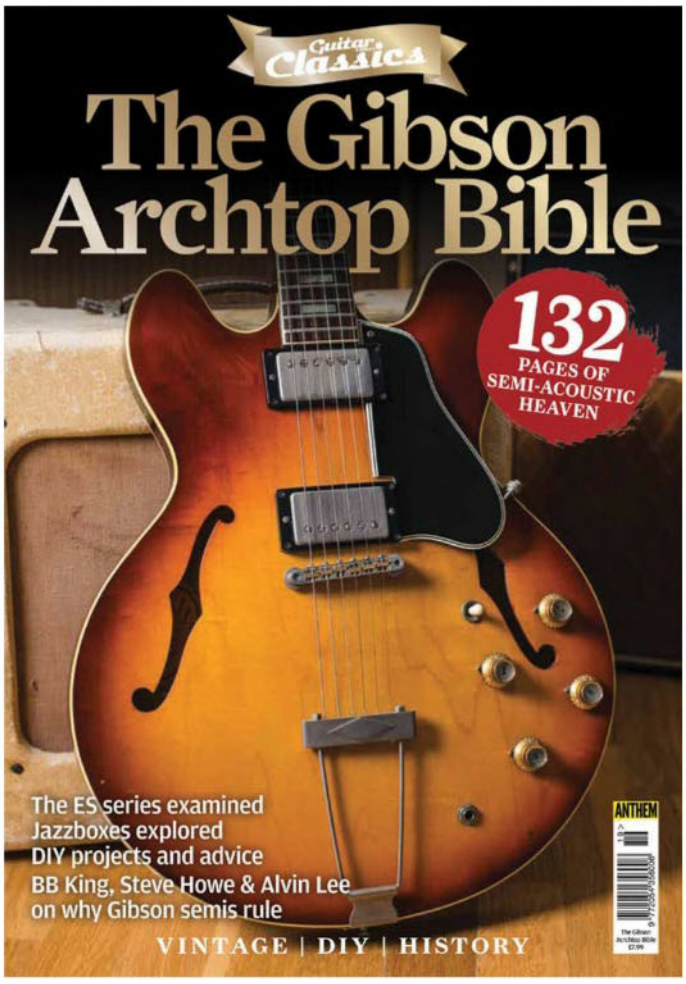
***G&B* Thanks for your letter, Jim. The ES-335 on the cover is indeed the very same instrument that you purchased from Cranes and it's also set to star in Vintage Bench Test in the next issue of G&B.**

Help me find my guitar

This is going back a bit, like something out of *Crimewatch*, but on the night of 9 November, 1991, a street gang broke into my Austin Metro, in Oak Lane, Bradford, and stole my beloved Squier Jazz Bass (the band, meanwhile, were enjoying a curry after a charity gig for Marie Curie Cancer Care. As Blackadder famously put it, 'The devil still farts in your face...').

The thieves (who were seen, and some locals called the cops) also got away with a Marshall amp, a Peterson cab and my wife's video camera, but what really hurt was losing the extension of my soul that that instrument had become.

A very fine bass, it was one of the early Japanese-made Squiers, which I'd customised with a gold Badass bridge, chrome knobs and EMG active pickups.



WRITTEN A LETTER OF THE MONTH?

Then you are the lucky winner of an Orange Crush PiX mini amp, featuring switchable overdrive, a built-in tuner and the Brit amp legend's timeless cosmetics. Visit **www.orangeamps.com** for the full spec.

ORANGE AMPLIFICATION

Decades have passed since I gave up hope of recovering it. Though not yet in the bus-pass zone, I've had a few other basses down the years, and currently play a Fender Precision and a Squier Tele. Recently, thinking about how nice it would be to have that Jazz again, something hit me.

The internet and email. They hadn't existed back then, and it had never occurred to me that they could help find a nicked guitar. I've now registered the bass on two stolen-property websites. But, hey, I'm not kidding myself. So please can I make an appeal to your good readers? If you see a Squier Jazz bass with a rosewood fretboard and dot inlays, please check its serial number. This one was E 636298. At the time, the bass had a white body and scratchplate, and, as I described, the hardware was mostly changed.

If anyone can reunite me with my lost friend, there's a reward of £100, and I'll pay the (blameless) current owner £500, regardless of its condition. So £600 if that's one and the same person.

I wonder how many fellow musos have a similar, wistful tale to tell...
Colin Hingston, Southampton

Driven to distraction

Hi *Guitar & Bass*, I've been trying for some time now to find the right distortion/overdrive pedal for my needs, and I wonder if your resident pedal expert can help.

I've now been through several – including a Big Muff Pi and ProCo Rat in search of the perfect dirtbox. The Big Muff really wasn't for me and heavily compressed my sound. When I plugged in the Rat, it sounded great, and I thought all my problems had been solved, yet at the first practice with my band, I began having second thoughts. Using a Fender DeVille, the Rat is a little too gritty; it also compresses too much and our drummer drowns me out! Tweaking the filter control helps a little, but it's still not right. Is there anything you could recommend that'll still cut through the mix when the going gets loud?
Graham Gallivan, via email

***G&B** Hi Graham, thanks for your letter. We're big fans of the Fulltone OCD. It's a first-class drive pedal with loads of sustain and harmonic overtones and a range of overdrive textures from Keef to Kurt. There's bags of headroom and punch, especially if you run it at 18 volts, so it won't turn to mush as can sometimes happen with a Muff or Rat. We're also fond of the Red Witch Famulus – reviewed in the January issue – because its two parallel drive circuits enable you to crank one and keep the other nice and clean to ensure the dynamics of your playing still come through.*

The Red Witch Famulus and Fulltone OCD (below) are two of our favourite drive pedals. Both will ensure you cut through the muddiest of mixes

HAVE YOUR SAY! Write to us via snail mail, *Guitar & Bass, Anthem Publishing, Suite 6 Piccadilly House, London Road, Bath BA1 6PL* or email **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com.** Alternatively get in touch via social media on Facebook or Twitter.

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Guitar & Bass

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

VOL 27 NO 7 ON SALE 4 MARCH

Joe Bonamassa

The hardest working man in the business talks us through the amazing guitars that powered his new album

REVIEWED

Echopark • Fender • Tone King • J Rockett • Wampler

INTERVIEWED

John Petrucci • Daughter • JD Simo and more...

•Contents are subject to change

New music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven album releases and reissues

Animal Collective

PAINTING WITH

The 10th LP from Baltimore's foremost sonic adventurers maintains their commitment to weird. Strangely, this leaves one feeling a bit bored, reminiscent as it is of previous efforts. The trademark manic psychedelia is, as always, centred around complex, multi-layered vocals. Thumping drum machines support beds of squelchy synths, bursts of electronic noise and heavily effected guitars. However, the lack of truly memorable tunes to be found amongst the smorgasbord of disorientating effects is inescapable. *FloriDada*, *Lying In The Grass* and *Golden Gal* are catchy highlights, but there are a number of one-paced plodders. Throughout, the mix feels cluttered, although occasional touches of piano or flute bring some humanity to the digital overload. Like some odd dream, *Painting With* is interesting but not all that memorable. **TS**

6/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *The Beach Boys, Crystal Castles*

Suede

NIGHT THOUGHTS

If Suede's 2013 comeback album *Bloodsports* took its cues from their glam-pop tinged 1993 debut, then *Night Thoughts* can be seen very much as a spiritual successor to their sophomore opus *Dog Man Star*. Like that classic record, *Night Thoughts* has similarly lofty ambitions: the music contained within being thematically linked to a Roger Sargent directed film of the same name. Some great music is on offer: opener *When You Are Young* features Richard Oakes's most infectious riff on record, while the ethereal *Pale Snow* sets a precedent for a detached, atmospheric mix of gorgeous vignettes. Old-school fans worry not, though, the trashy stomp of *Like Kids* and the soaring power of first single *Outsiders* hark back to the Suede of old. An album that finds Suede attempting, mostly successfully, to develop a more enhanced, lush sound, *Night Thoughts* stands among their best. **AP**

9/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Brian Eno, Kate Bush*

Anvil

ANVIL IS ANVIL

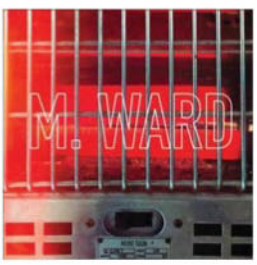
Anvil won the hearts and minds of many fans of guitar music back in 2008 when their excellent rockumentary *Anvil! The Story of Anvil* was released, ending a period spent in obscurity. Since then, the 1980s bad boys have undergone several line-up changes but continued to release new material. Needless to say, *Anvil Is Anvil* doesn't stray far from their original USP: making bad-ass music on subjects such as delivering school meals in the snow. The Canadian rockers' latest is an unmistakably 'Anvil' record, packed with big riffs, big drums, mythological lyrics and a bucket load of nostalgia. It's hard not to feel a sense of endearment towards Anvil, even if they're not your cup of tea, because they're undoubtedly committed to making the sort of music they love, regardless of the whims of current musical fashion. Abandon all cynicism and crank this record up to 11. **TT**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Iron Maiden, Turisas*

M Ward

MORE RAIN



You might know M Ward from his work with movie star Zooey Deschanel, or as a member of Monsters Of Folk with Conor Oberst. His eighth solo album, originally conceived as a DIY doo-wop record, is a delightful down-tempo collection featuring collaborations with the likes of REM's Peter Buck. *I'm listening* is a gorgeous lullaby with dreamy harmonies and *Slow Driving Man* is awash with delicious tremolo. **GW**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Bright Eyes, Monsters Of Folk*

The Besnard Lakes

A COLISEUM COMPLEX MUSEUM

Powered by grand reverb-drenched guitar, booming drums and soaring vocals, Canadian shoegazers The Besnard Lakes have steered towards the mainstream on *Coliseum*... and the results are admirable. Purposeful and confident, the record is a blend of widescreen alt-rock and noisy indie, with guitars to the fore. Big riffs and raw solos take precedence in what is an ambitious statement of intent. **TS**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Ride, The Antlers*

Yuck

STRANGER THINGS

The London band's hook-heavy third album kicks off in frenetic garage-pop fashion, with the scuzzy guitars and distorted vocals of *Hold Me Closer* and *Cannonball,* but there's greater depth here, too, as evidenced by the lovely *As I Walk Away*, on which bassist Mariko Doi takes over on vocals to a backdrop of sparkling arpeggios, scything tremolo and howling Bigsby bends. It's the high point of the record. **GW**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Weezer, The Cribs*

FEATURED ALBUM

David Bowie

BLACKSTAR

Although it's impossible to discuss this album without the horrendous perspective on it's creation that we now have, *Blackstar*, released on the Friday preceding the weekend of David Bowie's death, is an important work and was regarded as such even before we knew that he was nearing his end.

The album's near 10-minute title track is as bravely innovative as anything he attempted before – especially as it was released as the album's first single in unedited form, complete with a short film that featured all kinds of darkly surreal, cultish science-fiction imagery. Bowie himself, though looking older than we've ever seen him, appeared to our unknowing eyes to be in rude health as he invested himself thoroughly into the roles of several characters in what must stand as one of his finest videos. Made up musically of several sections, Ben Monder's scintillating lead guitar weaves around a schizophrenic mix and through a variety of tones.

Title track aside, the album continues with *Tis a Pity She Was A Whore*, with a slightly (and I do mean slightly) more conservative arrangement than its predecessor, complete with Bowie's finest Scott Walker-esque baritone and wild stabs of jazz, courtesy of sax player Donny McCaslin, whose unconventional performances dominate the record in much the same way jazz pianist Mike Garson did on *Aladdin Sane* over 40 years previously. Second single (and obvious commentary on Bowie's terminal situation) *Lazarus* musically conjures an air of funereal detachment, with a descending lead guitar riff that snakes in sombre fashion through a track clearly preoccupied with mortality.

The final two songs on this record are perhaps the other highlights, the sumptuous penultimate number *Dollar Days* being among Bowie's finest latter-era recordings. In the grim context of evaluating this album in a post-Bowie world, it becomes clear that the album's lyrical themes of frailty, despair and mortality were clearly far more pressing in its creator's mind than previously realised. This makes *Blackstar* a painful listen for anyone who has been touched by Bowie's greatness over the past six decades.

We can take comfort from the fact that, though clearly realising that his time was running short, David Bowie channeled all the pain of his struggle against cancer into making one final album. The closing chapter in the career of one of popular music's most important figures, *Blackstar* will be pored over for decades to come. **AP**

10/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Scott Walker, The XX, music...*

MARTY FRIEDMAN

"My Spinal Tap moment..."

Shred legend and former Megadeth and Cacophony guitarist on Kiss, J-pop and the Les Paul that got away...

1 I couldn't live without my...
"I never had a piece of gear like that. I'm actually surprised anyone does. There is plenty of fantastic stuff out there. Gear is like a fork or a spoon. Any good solid one will get the job done perfectly."

2 In another life I would be...
"Maybe a DJ, dealing in a casino, or selling shave ice on the beach."

Getty Images

Marty has written two books on J-pop

3 The moment that started it all...
"Seeing Kiss live in concert. I bought a guitar and amp the next day."

4 The one that got away...
"I borrowed a nice Les Paul to play at my show in Chile recently that sounded really nice. I offered to buy it from the guy who loaned it to me, and he was ready to do it, but I could see in his eyes that he really loved that guitar so I told him not to sell it to me."

5 My Spinal Tap moment...
"Never really had one that stands out, but lots of little ones for sure."

6 The best advice I've ever been given...
"Make sure you look good naked."

7 The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...
"Usually it's just the piece of music at hand. I rarely noodle around."

8 The most important thing on my rider...
"Sweet cereal!"

9 My guiltiest musical pleasure...
"I've written two books in Japan about how much I love J-pop, and most of that would make me pretty guilty of something..."

10 If I could learn to play one thing...
"There are plenty of things out there that I would love to learn. Whenever I hear something that I feel I should know, I just learn it. It should be noted that I only take the time to learn things that I think can help me grow and express myself musically. It's not necessary for anyone to try to know everything."

For more information on Marty Friedman, visit his website at www.martyfriedman.com

Kiss: the band that started it all...

Getty Images

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- Dave Mustaine

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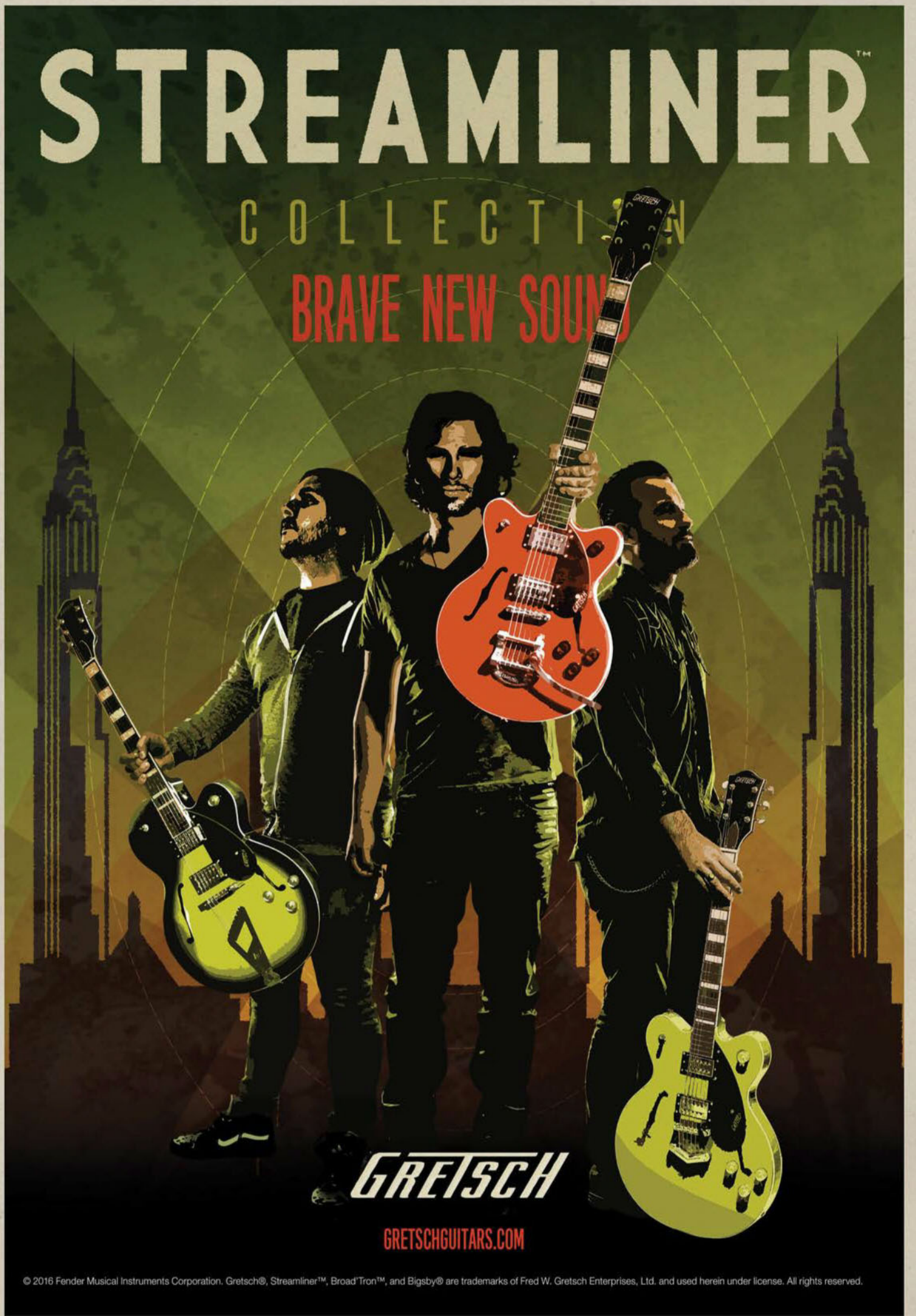

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